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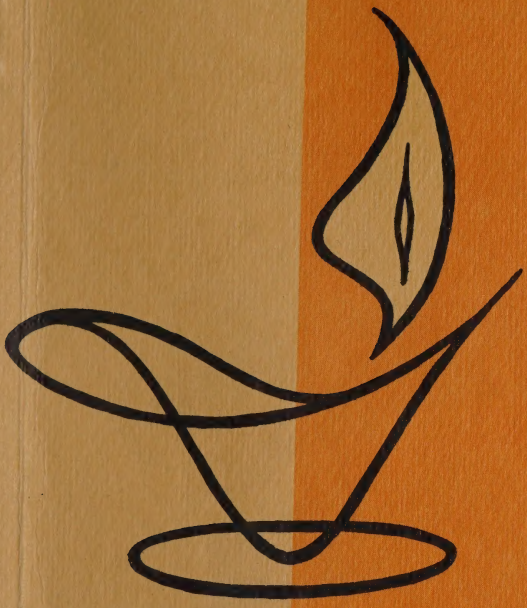

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A CENTURY OF WITNESS

The General Conference Mennonite Church

EDITED BY
CORNELIUS KRAHN AND JOHN F. SCHMIDT

MENNONITE PUBLICATION OFFICE
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1959

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PREFACE

The General Conference Mennonite Church is one of the larger bodies of the Mennonites of America. It was founded in West Point, Iowa, in 1860 after a number of congregations in Pennsylvania, Ontario, Ohio and Iowa had sought and found a basis for co-operation. Out of this small beginning grew the larger movement which is featured in this book. It is the story of how a group of Mennonites living under pioneer conditions and in isolation was challenged to a more vital Christian life that expressed itself in preaching the gospel abroad and at home through the spoken and printed word, and through sacrificial giving. This story does not relate the details and the total scope of the work of the Conference. It presents the account of how the Conference came into being, how various streams of Mennonitism became a part of it, how the conference organizations function, an evaluation of its strength and weakness, and how the witness can be strengthened in the future.

The Centennial of the General Conference Mennonite Church is being observed in connection with the triennial sessions of the Conference at Bluffton, Ohio, on August 16, 1959, as well as throughout the year in the congregations and climaxed at a special Study Conference to be held early in June, 1960, in Iowa where the Conference was founded one hundred years ago.

Erland Waltner, President
The General Conference Mennonite Church

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The Witness -- Yesterday and Today

Mennonites had their origin during the great Reformation more than four hundred years ago. Martin Luther inspired this movement. Consequently, the Mennonites have been in existence as long as the Lutheran, Reformed and Presbyterian churches, and longer than most of the American Protestant denominations. They have been called the "Left Wing" of the Reformation because they broke more radically with the Catholic tradition than did the others. All the Protestants emphasized the significance of the word of God, the Bible, a comparatively unknown book at that time, as the source of salvation. They differed only in the interpretation and application of this source. They also agreed in the basic doctrines and creeds of Christendom and their differences were mostly due to shifts in emphasis.

The Early Witness

Like the other Protestants, the Anabaptist-Mennonites did not represent a fully united front in matters of doctrine and

practice. That was not surprising. As far as doctrines were concerned, they strongly emphasized the application and practice of the same in daily living and did not stress well-defined and neatly-formulated concepts and creeds. They did not always agree in all details of doctrine and practice because they were spread over many countries with different religious and cultural traditions. The surprising fact is that this Anabaptist-Mennonite movement spontaneously found followers simultaneously in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and England, and that there was such a degree of unity. It was an international and ecumenical movement which held common basic views in various countries, differing in minor questions only.

It has been said that the views of the Anabaptists in which they differed from the reformers were too advanced for their day, and for that reason they were severely persecuted. They had more martyrs than any other group. For this reason the survivors scattered and spread over many countries. In later times under more favorable conditions, their beliefs and principles were seen in a different light and some of these found acceptance and application by other groups. This was foreseen by Balthasar Hubmaier who stated before his martyrdom: "Divine truth cannot be killed, although it may be apprehended, punished, crowned with thorns, crucified and placed in a tomb. It will, nevertheless, arise victoriously on the third day and rule and triumph throughout eternity."

This persecution made a lasting impression on the brotherhood regardless of the country in which it took place. Today when we look for a common denominator of the Anabaptist-Mennonites of the early days, whether in Switzerland, France Germany or the Netherlands, we find it to be the original concept and the awareness that all true Christians are and must be persecuted in and by the world, and that the true Chris-

tians are always a minority and must be separated from the world unto God. This motif runs through the pages of the early Mennonite classic, *The Martyr's Mirror*, and is found in later centuries as the underlying cause for most of the Mennonite migrations from country to country. It at once constitutes both the strength and the weakness of the Mennonites. They cannot escape from this heritage just as one cannot exchange his parents. All they really can do is to aim to make full use of the positive elements of this heritage and to correct its negative aspects.

This heritage gave them courage, faith, endurance, steadfastness and other positive characteristics. Also it often made them withdraw from the world in which they lived and become *die Stillen im Lande*. In the latter case, their missionary zeal and vision faded away and they concentrated on becoming tillers of the soil, subduing the earth of the Lord in desert places. The swamps along the Vistula River, the steppes along the Dnepr River, and the prairies of North and South America have been converted into bread baskets. This has been one of the major contributions which Mennonites have made fleeing from Switzerland to South Germany, Alsace-Lorraine and Pennsylvania, and from the Netherlands to Prussia, Poland, Russia and the prairies of North America and recently to the uninhabited areas of South America.

The Mennonites became tillers of the soil subduing the earth of the Lord. They have been effective as agricultural pioneers in many parts of the world, although they have always been small in number and often in danger of becoming too quiet as *die Stillen im Lande*.

However, as soon as geographical distances or cultural barriers are overcome, they confront the world and the perplexities of modern society. In many instances they were or are not pre-

pared to meet the challenge resulting from this encounter. Some even begin to despise their heritage and surrender everything that was dear to their fathers. This does not mean that they do not make a contribution to the society and to Christendom at large. It means, however, that they dissociate themselves from a corporate witness of the faith of their fathers.

The group witness of the total brotherhood in most of the countries has not always been united. Many outside influences and inner controversies have often weakened the witness and broken its effectiveness. Nevertheless, there have always been some areas in which the witness was more or less united and convincing. One area in which Mennonites have made a unique contribution is their emphasis on the significance of the Christian brotherhood or the church. Each member is a link in the brotherhood deserving all attention and making a valuable contribution. Paul's concept of the body of Christ in which each member plays a significant role and is cared for has been realized at many occasions in the Mennonite brotherhood. This includes the good qualities of mutual aid and helpfulness, the caring for the sick and the weak and aiding the old. At times this church concept produced negative results when too rigid discipline was exercised in order to maintain the body of Christ without spot and wrinkle. Not always was the zeal for Christ and His church matched by the love of Christ for the brother.

The Revived Witness

Since the middle of the past century, the Mennonites of America have been influenced by the spiritual movements of the day such as revivals, missions, education, Sunday school, abstinence, etc. These influences have made a great impact on the brotherhood, challenging it and even causing divisions. The divisions have been a great handicap. However, we must realize that not all the present-day groups in the Mennonite broth-

erhood originated because of internal strife. The Mennonites of America came from various European countries, settling at different places and at different times. Only recently have modern means of communication and organization brought the groups closer together. Great challenges of the day like World Wars I and II made the Mennonite groups who had learned to know each other start working together. One hundred years ago the Mennonites of America, although they had not spread as they have today, consisted of small groups and settlements affiliating with each other primarily because of a common European background or a proximity within their settlement.

John H. Oberholtzer and his friends took a big step toward bringing together like-minded congregations in order to strengthen their work for the cause of Christ. He and representatives of groups who had recently come from Germany where mission work and a more spontaneous expression of religious experiences and feelings had been introduced through pietistic influences found a need to join hands. They were filled with a new zeal, eager to learn new methods, ready to promote a more effective outreach program through a closer co-operation with other groups. These were among the most significant factors which caused the founding of the General Conference Mennonite Church in 1860 and other conferences that followed later.

The first American Mennonite missionary outreach began around 1880 among the Indians of Oklahoma, followed by mission work in India which was conducted by various Mennonite conferences. Soon China and Africa followed and more recently Japan and Korea have been added. South America has been a mission field for decades. It is amazing to see how the urge and call to bring the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth has caught the imagination of all Mennonite groups, even of those who until recently lived in complete

isolation. Missionary interest is, as a rule, the door through which a conservative Mennonite group that has been isolated from the stream of life and the culture of its environment for centuries will enter the world and gradually develop an appreciation of the culture of its environment and accept its challenge and responsibilities. Only a few groups remain untouched, and they succeeded only by moving to isolated environments.

New Frontiers

After missions have been accepted as a challenge or contact with the world, greater interest in education, religious and secular, usually follows. Teaching becomes an acceptable profession. Nursing and medical professions follow and step by step the group becomes an active participant in the life of its environment.

Another area in which Mennonites have made a contribution is the conviction that a Christian cannot participate in warfare. Although this belief and attitude is no longer universal among the Mennonites, they have given a definite witness as a result of it. Originally they simply withdrew from a warfaring society and assumed little responsibility toward the society. The "escape" from military service which caused many migrations is today not generally sought in the same manner as in former decades. At present Mennonites accept the challenge and responsibility of the society in which they live and conduct programs of the feeding and healing hand at home and abroad.

It is a generally accepted responsibility by all Mennonite groups to help in relieving the suffering of mankind on a physical, social and economic level in addition to taking care of the spiritual needs through the mission program. World Wars I and II challenged the Mennonites to enter into an

"Alternative Service" program in lieu of military service. Going a second mile after the conclusion of the war, they are more and more compelled to continue a service program "in the name of Christ." Young people are entering voluntary service to aid in such a program at home and abroad. There is hardly any country which has not been touched in some way by the testimony extended through the channels of the Mennonite Central Committee, a service organization in which all Mennonite groups participate. It is true that what has been done and is being done along this line is only the beginning of what ought to be done. In figures this means that after World War I the Mennonites of the United States and Canada contributed $2,454,246 for emergency relief in foreign lands and after World War II (1944-1950) $12,640,412. The baptized membership was approximately 200,000 at both times. This is cited here not as a climax of achievement but as an indication of a beginning of a response to a challenge which must steadily increase. The peace witness can be maintained only if we succeed in increasing our voluntary sacrificial giving and service program. The testimony should be stronger in numbers of people offering their services, in the total support of the program and the full realization that this can be and is a legitimate outreach program "in the name of Christ."

Another area in which Mennonites have made significant progress is in the realm of education. Until recently the North American Mennonites were primarily rural due to the fact that in Europe they had been persecuted and had become pioneers of the soil by withdrawing from the populated areas. Since World Wars I and II, great changes have taken place along these lines. Agriculture has been revolutionized through modern machinery. Younger generations are compelled to seek employment in industries and cities. This breaks their isolation from the culture and society in which Mennonites

live. They realize their need for better education in order to be professionally equipped. In order to get a Christian education, Mennonite schools were established in the early days of the settlement. Some of those seeking higher or specialized education return to their communities; more and more do not. The great challenge of our day is to witness wherever it be, not only in the solid Mennonite community but also in "dispersion." Another challenge is to establish Christian spearheads in cities. A weakness of the Mennonites in their witness has been a lack of realization that they have a responsibility not only for the spiritual, social and cultural nurture of their members who move to the cities, but also for others. Those of the brotherhood who move to cities should be the nucleus or spearhead around which an outreach program is built. Because of the constant shift of the population from the rural to the urban areas and the lack of vision and courage along these lines, the Mennonites are hardly holding their own as far as numbers are concerned in a day when the population increases rapidly. This is a great weakness at the present and can become disastrous.

The Basis of the Witness

One of the Mennonite weaknesses in the witness is the lack of consistent adherence to a doctrinal structure. From the early days Mennonites emphasized with the apostle James and the Sermon on the Mount that Christianity must be demonstrated in daily life. The early Anabaptists fully retained the basic doctrines and creedal formulations of traditional Christendom. A glimpse into the early writings including *The Martyr's Mirror* demonstrates this. However, as a corrective measure against lip service to doctrines of some of the Reformation churches, they became more and more emphatic in their stress on a "practical" Christianity. Such mottoes as

"See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" and "Baptize adults, speak what is true, free in Christian beliefs, deeds are more important than creeds" became quite popular in the Netherlands and in some ways also among Mennonites of other countries.

What was once a strength can become a weakness. On the one hand, a shallow moralism without basic Christian doctrinal motivation has been a danger for Mennonites. On the other hand, among the Mennonites of Russia and America Pietism and religious emotionalism have caused a shift from what little emphasis there was left on the traditional creeds and Christian doctrines to an emotionally-experienced Christianity. It cannot be denied that Christianity must be experienced and practiced, but that should not make us lose sight of the significance of doctrinal and creedal formulations and motivations. Sooner or later he pays the price who pursues an unbalanced course for any length of time. The balance can be achieved only by an equal emphasis in preaching on the significance of the basic Christian doctrines as they have been expressed and formulated in the Apostolic and Nicean creeds, the traditional Mennonite confessions of faith and catechisms, and a personally-experienced conversion, a commitment to discipleship, all within the framework of the church. The dual emphasis on an emotionally-experienced conversion and the significance of consecrated Christian living which the Mennonites have held for generations in America is basically Christian and sound as long as they remain within the context of the classic Christian doctrines and ethical concepts.

Negligence in worship, preaching and in the training of the young people regarding the traditional catechisms and creeds has produced negative results and will continue to do so unless we return to the basic doctrinal foundations. That Mennonites have been and are being influenced by so many

unstable movements and individuals is mostly due to the fact that they have lost sight of the significance of a sound doctrinal structure based on the Bible. Denominations like the Lutherans, Presbyterians and Episcopalians who emphasize this tradition have had fewer problems which arise from the influence of conflicting thoughts and movements causing disunity, disruption, splits and a weakening of the Christian witness. It can easily be said that the course the General Conference will take in its second century may depend to a large extent on how well we will succeed in finding a balance along these lines. No blind acceptance of the best formulated statements of doctrines, however, can take the place of a living faith in Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour and the obligation to express this as a personal witness.

Toward a United Witness

The vision of John H. Oberholtzer of bringing like-minded congregations together in order to strengthen the Christian witness in the various fields caught fire and spread. This is not to say that it would not have happened without Oberholtzer. Others would have had the vision, and necessity would have made it a reality in order to make the work of the church effective in modern society. The General Conference Mennonite Church was among the first Mennonite groups which felt compelled to pool its resources and plan together on a larger scale. That was one hundred years ago. Other Mennonite groups are and will commemorate similar centennials. The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, had a small beginning in Ohio one hundred years ago. The Mennonite Brethren organized in 1860 in Russia. The latter soon promoted their work through the channels of a general conference organization. In 1898 the Mennonite General Con-

ference was founded, now the largest Mennonite body, although districts of the group had functioned long ago.

In Europe conference organizations were introduced in the Netherlands in the days of Napoleon when all Dutch Mennonites united in one conference because the crisis necessitated the pooling of all spiritual and economic resources. The Mennonites in other European countries soon organized similar conferences. In 1925 the first Mennonite World Conference took place in Switzerland where the cradle of Anabaptism stood four hundred years ago. Although modern conferences originated during the 19th century, it must be said that some forms of conference organizations were in existence in the Netherlands right from the early days.

Today the various conferences of Mennonites in North America are finding new avenues in which they can or must co-operate in order to make their witness effective. Not only related conferences merge (Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren; Evangelical Mennonite Brethren and Evangelical Mennonite Church) but also conferences join hands in certain enterprises which they can do better working together than separately. These united efforts are due to the fact that today they are more aware than ever before that they are serving the same Lord in the same mission. It is true not all co-operation is motivated purely by the love of Christ and inspired by Christ's prayer for unity. At times it is dictated by economic considerations, by the challenge of the disintegrating influence of a secularizing world around us or the atheistic threat. In Mennonite history, persecution and oppression have quite often brought groups together that were not ready for it otherwise. The best illustrations are found during the 16th century in Switzerland and the Netherlands which was again repeated in Russia during the 20th century. Christendom in a secularized world threatened by

an aggressive, atheistic Communism must realize that a united Christian witness is an absolute necessity. This realization speeds up inter-Mennonite co-operation on various levels.

For decades Mennonite conferences have co-operated in the mission fields realizing that the problems and obstacles they confront need to be met in a united effort. Similarly, many united efforts can be listed at home. In some communities Mennonites co-operate on the local level with other Mennonite and non-Mennonite groups. This takes place in the religious education program: Sunday school, summer Bible school and in other areas. Today publications like the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* and the Sunday school materials can be produced only because ways and means have been found through which the various groups co-operate in these extensive programs. The most recent development in co-operative efforts is the establishment of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries. All these efforts are great steps of faith in the direction of a more effective, united witness of Christians in our day. This we must say looking back over the years when many small groups were seemingly more interested in independence than in an effective, united witness. Looking at the great task and the division of the church as a whole and the Mennonites in particular, we must say that only the first small steps have been taken in strengthening our witness and making it convincing. We cannot speak of peace, love, unity and any other Christian virtues without realizing that we do not have them in the fullest measure unless we demonstrate this in our contacts as members of a congregation, as churches of a community, as conferences in a nation, and on an international level. Much must be done in order to make our witness clear and effective in the decades to come. We are not speaking of a unity at any price, but of a unity among Christians motivated by the love of Christ who gave His life for a lost world.

A Century Ago -- The Founding of the Conference

The General Background

The first half of the nineteenth century in the United States was marked by almost explosive expansion, both in population and in territory. The Revolution was just completed and all restrictions were off. In the first twenty years of the century over half a million people poured into Ohio, about 150,000 into Indiana, and some 55,000 into Illinois, claiming farms from the wilderness. By 1850 settlements were more or less continuous out to the eastern boundary of Oklahoma, Nebraska and Kansas, and population had jumped over the prairies to California. Fifty per cent of American population was now outside the original colonial area. Immigration from foreign countries was a major factor in the population expansion and by 1860, 13 per cent of the total American population was foreign born. The Germans were notable in this immigration and could be found in large numbers on the frontier where they settled

on good farm land and in the major cities along routes of travel, such as Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis and Chicago.

Territorial expansion was equally spectacular. The success of the Revolution had opened up territory to the Mississippi River. Successive additions had by 1950 completed territorial expansion to the Pacific Ocean. Good new land was available first at $2 per acre, later reduced to $1.25, and finally offered for free homesteading.

With this expansion, transportation was demanded, first post roads and canals, then railroads. Manufactures expanded through home industries to small manufacturing concerns. Trade found new markets, internal and foreign. Social conditions were altered as the freedom, independence and uncouthness of the frontier began to overbalance the old colonial culture. A new America was being born with democracy the watchword and unlimited progress the ideal.

The religious significance of these developments is of deep concern. State support for the church was eliminated, first by disestablishment of the Anglican Church, then by cancellation of special legal rights of the Congregationalists in New England. Growing demands for religious freedom on the part of unrecognized groups as the Baptists and Presbyterians along with growing humanitarian sentiment culminated in complete recognition of religious freedom in the period between 1786 and 1833. This removed the possibility for legal pressure or social force to insist on any more church connection than the individual cared voluntarily to give; it also allowed equal opportunity for all religious groups to press for adherence and support.

In the process of migration and the rough and tumble of frontier life, ordered church life was one of the first things to suffer. A whole generation was arising which knew little

of the finer things of life. There were exceptions: occasional congregations moved en masse having their pastor with them, occasional concerned ministers sought zealously to gather up scattered members and new converts into organized fellowships. These were the heroic days of the circuit rider, the camp meeting, the Great Revival. Thousands were converted, new standards of life were impressed and the moral life of the rude country was changed for the better. In the process Methodists multiplied seven fold between 1800 and 1830, Baptists and Presbyterians three and four fold. New denominations arose from energetic leaders or splits in former groups and eccentric moves were found as well as idealistic social utopias. The proportion of church members to total population increased from under 7 per cent in 1800 to over 15 per cent in 1850. In the wake of the revival the growing church found new fields of work and new methods. Mission societies were organized early and the first American foreign mission board formed in 1810; others followed. Sunday schools were introduced and later in 1826 there was organized the interdenominational American Sunday School Union. A slogan was adopted of "A Sunday school in every neighborhood in the West." Temperance societies and anti-slavery societies sprang up. Education was promoted with over 150 church colleges founded between 1830 and 1860, and a new philosophy and system of public education in which the states became responsible for organizing, financing and enforcing primary education. Thus it was that in the first half of the nineteenth century, there was a sense of feverish activity—expansion, adaptation, reform—in every area of life including the religious as well as social, economic and political.

Mennonites at Mid-nineteenth Century

Mennonites first came to North America in the eighteenth

century as part of the large German migration of colonial times. They were attracted by the freedom offered in Pennsylvania and settled in communities where, conscious of their new found liberty, they determined to preserve their faith and way of life. Religious patterns were set up following their European Mennonite ideals and home life was organized around the farm and church with strong emphasis on the stable family virtues. Education was provided by private schools under individuals or under the church not inferior to that conducted in other schools of the day.

As the Quaker control of Pennsylvania became less stable and troubles loomed on the horizon, the Mennonites tried the more firmly to hold to their religious ideals. Church publications from Europe were imported or reprinted and by special arrangement the *Martyr's Mirror* was translated from Dutch into German and published to encourage faithfulness in tribulation. With the Revolutionary War free communication with Europe was cut. Immigration ended. No new leaders came to supply the loss of the first European trained men.

By the end of the century the sense of separation from American society, enhanced by the severing of relations with Europe and the lower standards of training which had become current, tended to stabilize religious conditions at the eighteenth century status. The opening nineteenth century, therefore, caught the Mennonites unprepared for the tremendous changes which were taking place in social and religious life. Psychologically they were tied to the past. Leaders were out of touch with the changes taking place and in the main were in the latter years of life. Thus with a deep yearning for faithfulness came the inability to evaluate the signifiance of new moves.

Political and cultural movements bypassed the Mennonites

largely because of the language difference; the same was true of the religious revival until it appeared in the figure of Jacob Albright and the Evangelical movement in the German language and for Germans. The revival with its mourners' bench and free emotional expression was in general not practiced by the Mennonites. Along with this, however, came invitations and pressure for participation in Sunday schools, the temperance movement and the cause of foreign missions with which were tied up new demands for education and organization and intercommunication.

The net result of the outside pressure of the new movements and the internal aspiration for faithfulness to the fathers can be summarized in three statements: First, it resulted in more rigid attempt to control the situation under the name of "faithfulness" or "obedience" or "humility." Secondly, large numbers of individuals were lost to the church being drawn away by what they regarded as good movements not accepted by the church. Thirdly, in the case of individuals with a larger following, whole groups were affected and schisms introduced into the church.

Looking back it is apparent now that if some of the insistent and aggressive individuals could have been more moderate and if time could have been allowed for better understanding, much of the unhappiness and unlovely aspects of the situation could have been avoided. That, however, was another characteristic of the times, for reform and new movements and schism and reorganization were in the air.

The schism of 1847 in which the East Pennsylvania Conference of Mennonites was born represents clearly the clash of forces beyond personalities. John H. Oberholtzer, the center of the new side, was a town resident and a locksmith rather than a farmer from the country; he had enough education to pursue the vocation of teacher; he had contacts that

brought him invitations as a preacher to speak in non-Mennonite pulpits; he read widely and when the situation was ripe, he was ready to set up his own printing press. Obviously imbued with some of the ideas of democracy, acquainted with "modern" methods of education, inspired with the ideals of the Sunday school movement, concerned about the call of foreign missions, and being of an aggressive nature, he became the apostle of new ideas within his local church group. It is not essential to our story that he was perhaps over-insistent or that he was met with unreasoning opposition. The important thing is that the nineteenth century was creating an impact on the Mennonites. In this process the new body was set up, later to become the Eastern District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church, and a base provided for freer operation of some of the ideas current in the surrounding religious and social environment, ideas which by the end of the century were to be widely accepted among all bodies of Mennonites.

Mennonite Centers, 1850

Eastern Pennsylvania was the primary location of Mennonite immigrants as they arrived in Colonial times. Immediately after the Revolutionary War large numbers of these Pennsylvania-German Mennonites migrated across the border into Ontario, Canada, first near Niagara, then on to Waterloo County, near present Kitchener.

With the return of peace following 1812, European Mennonites again looked to this country and by 1820 new immigration moves were on foot. These people arrived just in time to swell the great westward expansion into the new frontier country where plentiful land was available of good quality and at a cheap price. They followed the prevalent routes of travel forming communities at frontier points

which rapidly became settled territory. Swiss Mennonites came overland across the mountains and located in eastern Ohio (Wayne County), in western Ohio (Putnam County), and in Indiana (Adams County). South German Mennonites of Swiss extraction of the same stock as the Pennsylvania immigration a century earlier followed the easier river routes and left a trail of settlers from western New York (Clarence Center) to the vicinity of Cleveland (Ashland County, Ohio) and along the Ohio River, near Cincinnati (Butler County, Ohio) and down near its juncture with the Mississippi not far from St. Louis (Lee County, Iowa; Summerfield, Illinois). At the same time considerable numbers of Amish from Alsace-Lorraine, Bavaria and Hesse were locating in Ohio (Fulton and Butler counties) and in central Illinois (McLean and Tazewell counties). Pennsylvania Mennonites and Amish joined in the westward move also to form communities from Ohio to the Mississippi River.

There were important differences, first between the Mennonites and the Amish, and secondly between the eighteenth century Mennonite immigrants and the new nineteenth century immigrants. In the first case the Mennonites were somewhat more open to outside influences, and in the second case the new immigrants were better acquainted with and already involved in some of the new movements like foreign missions and education. There was a difference also between the solid communities where tradition was more deeply intrenched and the isolated or fringe communities where outside contacts were unavoidable and more effective in influencing life.

Leaders and Their Concerns

Reference has been made to the schism of 1847 and the East Pennsylvania Mennonite Conference which resulted from

it. John H. Oberholtzer, as the storm center of this division, continued to be the outstanding leader in the new conference and one of the most important figures in the moves for a general conference which was to come to birth in another decade. It is not difficult to pick flaws in the character and activities of Oberholtzer; the very qualities that made him indispensable as a leader made it difficult at times for others to work with him. His aggressiveness and initiative offended those who would go more slowly; his openness to outside influences was incompatible with strict Mennonite interpretation of the times; his insistence on clear-cut decision made reasonable compromise impossible at times; his youth and determination suggested lack of humility to his older and more experienced fellow workers. Nevertheless, in spite of, and perhaps because of, these qualities, he became the central human agent in many important moves. Unwilling to submit to arbitrary restriction on garb and ecclesiastical control, Oberholtzer prepared a constitution for church government which specified New Testament standards and democratic methods. This *Ordnung* precipitated the division of 1847. With modification it later became the constitution of the new East Pennsylvania Mennonite Conference and obviously influenced early General Conference Mennonite Church methods of co-operation.

Oberholtzer in 1849 renewed, by letter to the Dutch Mennonites, the European correspondence that had been interrupted for seventy-five years. His eager desire to impart and receive information regarding the new movement and the new problems of ministerial support and mission work and education of children are intensely interesting. His early work in catechetical training expanded after 1847 into special *Kinderlehre* and in another ten years into a more regularly organized Sunday school. Probably the move that had the

widest influence was when Oberholtzer purchased a used printing press and in 1852 set up a printing shop in his old locksmith quarters. Here he inaugurated the first successful Mennonite periodical in America under the title *Religiöser Botschafter.* Issued bi-weekly, it reached out to Mennonites all over the country and published everything of concern to this new movement—sermons, general news, doctrinal and practical matters as conversion and missions, letters from Europe, conference reports. Leaders were brought into contact with each other and the editor in particular became acquainted with Mennonites over a large territory, including fellow-believers in obscure places.

The correspondence and travels of Oberholtzer were also of importance and usually concerned with his various projects. Trips to Canada and Ohio helped relate the problems of these localities to the Pennsylvania situation, while letters continued the progress of acquaintance and understanding. With himself at the center of so many of these new moves, there was no other person besides Oberholtzer who quite so epitomized or symbolized the growing sentiment to be caught up in the General Conference.

Daniel Hoch, originally from Pennsylvania, was the leader of a revitalized group of Mennonites in Ontario who had been caught up in the revival movement. Ephraim Hunsberger was pastor of a Pennsylvania Mennonite group that had gone west and located at Wadsworth, Ohio, In 1852 he began his work and immediately felt the need of more aggressive work in Sunday schools, missions, starting a church publication, co-operation with other denominations. Between these Canada and Ohio groups there developed a loose working relationship about 1854.

Simultaneously the new South German immigration was developing active centers farther west. Daniel Krehbiel lo-

cated at Cleveland, Ohio, in 1832, and became a connecting link with those moving west. Other Krehbiels came also, of whom Christian Krehbiel was probably to become the best known in the General Conference Mennonite Church. Daniel Hege and Christian Schowalter were teachers in schools of the new immigrants, both active by the fifties and to become well known later in the conference movement. The most active centers of these South German Mennonites were at Summerfield, Illinois, and in Lee County, Iowa. The spirit of these congregations was strikingly similar to that of the Oberholtzer group in Pennsylvania. They used "lay" ministers but preferred a trained ministry; they had pleasant relations with the German Evangelical Church in Iowa and used the same building, even listening to the same preachers; they were interested in missions and in the fifties were already sending contributions to their European mission societies. Without mentioning all of the Mennonite communities in the Middle West, this at least introduces those which were to be involved most closely in the move with which we are concerned.

The Organization of the Conference

Four areas have been mentioned where moves for new activities were in progress. In the first—Eastern Pennsylvania —fourteen congregations or parts of congregations, supporting John H. Oberholtzer and consisting of about five hundred members, were organized as a conference in 1847. In the second and third—Ontario and Ohio—two congregations were finding a common interest in concern for missions and isolated Mennonites and in 1855 started a series of joint conferences, loose at first but directed toward union. In the fourth—Southeastern Iowa—two separate groups of common background and common concerns had organized as a single

congregation under the name German Evangelical Mennonite Congregation in 1854. Each of these had given expression to desires for further co-operation and even union.

The actual proposal which resulted in the General Conference Mennonite Church came from a meeting in March, 1859, when the Iowa congregations, West Point and Franklin, appointed four members to serve as a committee with instructions to "correspond with other Mennonite churches and invite them to join this union." The time for the next meeting was set as the "second day of Pentecost in 1860 at West Point." Oberholtzer received a copy of the resolutions and published them with the approving comment that the western brethren would "blow the ashes from the glimmering coals that the flame of the Lord may appear," but both the Canada-Ohio Conference and the Pennsylvania Conference met without taking any notice of the invitation. In May, 1860, less than four weeks before time for the West Point meeting, the Pennsylvania Conference agreed that ministers who wished to do so might attend voluntarily. About the same time important matters to be discussed at the conference session were announced, including the organization of a missionary society to serve all Mennonites in the United States, the founding of an educational institution, and tract publication. With this incentive at the last minute, friends of Oberholtzer made it financially possible for him and Enos Loux as traveling companion to make the long trip. There is evidence that two other outsiders were present, Joseph Schroeder from Polk City, Iowa, and S. B. Bauman from Ontario, but otherwise the attendance was limited to West Point-Franklin members. The sessions took place in the German Methodist Church at West Point.

With this inauspicious beginning the Conference proceeded with what were to be significant steps. On Monday, May

28, John H. Oberholtzer was elected as chairman and Christian Schowalter as secretary. A resolution summarily passed provided for a committee of five to "submit a written plan for a form of union for the Mennonite congregations of North America by the morning of May 29"—the next morning. The committee consisted of John H. Oberholtzer, Jacob Krehbiel I, Joseph Schroeder, David Ruth and Jacob Krehbiel II, and they produced the next morning a document of six points as a basis for union. The term union (*Vereinigung*) was used though it was more properly an association which was proposed since each congregation retained unhampered individuality. Fundamentally three ideas were involved. The first was unlimited participation by which any and every congregation, regardless of other connections, could join. The second was association on a Mennonite basis. Definition of this was not so easy, but it was stated briefly as "the evangelical position of Menno Simons" and mentioned specifically were baptism, nonswearing of oaths, and authority of the Scriptures. On this broad basis it was hoped that all Mennonites might be attracted together for prosecution of the cause of Christ. Home and foreign missions were commended to the churches; three treasuries were recognized; and the publishing house already in existence was recommended for support.

This first General Conference session (1860) had less than a dozen members present representing not more than five congregations and those unofficially, but groundwork was laid and a further conference called for the next year at Wadsworth, Ohio. Here in 1861 eight churches were represented by seventeen informal delegates. By the third conference in 1863, held at Summerfield, Illinois, sixteen delegates represented about eighteen congregations, this time as officially elected representatives. In 1866 the fourth Gen-

(Top) Third General Conference Mennonite Church session at the Summerfield Mennonite Church, Summerfield, Illinois, 1863. A large number of the members of this church migrated to Halstead, Kansas, under the leadership of Christian Krehbiel. (Bottom) The Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, Goessel, Kansas, recently established by Mennonites coming from Russia was host to the Conference in 1896.

(Top) The Berne Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana, was host of the General Conference sessions in 1902, and the Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in 1905. (Center) Mennonites from Prussia who settled near Beatrice, Nebraska, were the host of the Conference in 1908, while the Mennonite Church of Meno, Oklahoma, was host in 1914. (Bottom) General Conference session at Hutchinson, Kansas, 1929, and 46th session in Memorial Hall, North Newton, Kansas, 1945.

The Mennonite Churches of Winnipeg and Manitoba were host of the General Conference session in 1956. The interior of the Young United Church, Winnipeg, shows the Conference motto behind the platform. The first General Conference session to be held in Canada took place at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in 1938. The Conference of Mennonites in Canada has experienced rapid growth as a result of migrations after World Wars I and II.

(Top) Mission Board, 1899: Gustav Harder, Christian Schowalter, A. B. Shelly; (back) M. Moyer, Peter Balzer, S. F. Sprunger. (Right) Delegates of Middle District Conference and representatives of Central Conference, 1898. (Center) Trustees of General Conference, 1908: David Goerz, J. B. Baer, A. B. Shelly, S. F. Sprunger; (back) J. J. Flickinger, C. F. Claassen, J. J. Krehbiel, Christian Krehbiel. (Right) Foreign Mission Board, 1908: S. F. Sprunger, A. B. Shelly, Gustav Harder; (back) J. W. Kliewer, C. J. van der Smissen, C. H. Wedel. (Below) First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio, host of Conference, 1911. (Right) Olin A. Krehbiel presents gavel to new Conference president, Erland Waltner, Winnipeg, 1956.

eral Conference met at Wadsworth again, with delegates presenting written credentials from their churches and with votes apportioned by church membership—one vote for every thirty members or fraction thereof. By the end of the decade, the General Conference was functioning along basically the same lines as at present: membership in the Conference by congregation, representation by elected delegates with votes according to membership, the General Conference responsible for broad policies and church-wide projects, and individual congregations relatively independent but associating for fellowship and co-operative enterprises.

The Growth of the Conference

Three important lines of development are evident in subsequent growth of the General Conference, and they can be referred to but briefly. First is the work envisaged and the specific projects undertaken. Secondly is the increasing adherence as member congregations multiplied and center of interest shifted. Thirdly is the constitutional development and organization for work.

The first Conference outlined sufficient areas of work to keep successive conferences busy for many years. The basic lines which were proposed were missions, education, and publication. Daniel Hege was appointed as *Reiseprediger* with instruction to visit all Mennonite communities, the isolated as well as the more populated, explaining the challenges of the new day and the possibilities of fuller Mennonite co-operation. His tour of 1862, ended by his premature death in November, did much to clear misunderstanding and win support.

Hege's visits were accompanied with an appeal for funds to establish a theological school and, even in the face of Civil War and high prices, he secured nearly six thousand

dollars. At the 1863 General Conference, steps were inaugurated to start the school. A committee of supervisors was appointed and authorized to build, locating the institution at Wadsworth, Ohio. By the next Conference in 1866 the building was completed and dedicated, but the faculty and especially the principal was not in sight. After some delay Carl Justus van der Smissen, a well-trained German Mennonite minister, was induced to accept the position. He arrived in December, 1868. This dedicated man and his family made a profound impression on the young students. The story of the Wadsworth School is inspiring and at the same time pathetic, for it was closed December, 1878. The eleven years of operation contributed profoundly to the development of the General Conference. It developed relationships and gave a project for co-operation; it introduced higher education and demonstrated its compatibility with evangelical zeal and humanity; it provided a generation of trained ministers and inoculated zeal for missions and new methods of work; and it graduated a missionary candidate who drew the church into actual mission work.

When the school was suspended the interest and involvement in missions had progressed to the place where it immediately picked up developed resources and provided the General Conference with as big a challenge as the school had offered. Before 1870 mission interest had been confined to home work and to financial support of foreign work done by others. In 1872 Samuel S. Haury, a Wadsworth graduate of the first class, dedicated himself "to missionary service among the heathen" and applied to the Conference for direction to a field. This was a new responsibilty and eventually led to a study of possible fields and the opening of work among the Arapahoe Indians in Oklahoma in 1880. For twenty years the American Indian work absorbed conference

energies until the 20th century opened foreign work in a variety of fields.

In the publishing field Oberholtzer had started the *Religiöser Botschafter* personally in 1852. This was taken over by a stock company and continued as *Das Christliche Volksblatt* in 1856, which name was retained until 1867 when a new editor was introduced and management turned over to the Eastern District. A new name, *Der Mennonitische Friedensbote,* was then adopted. In the middle of the seventies there appeared a new periodical, *Zur Heimat,* edited in Kansas and appealing particularly to the new Mennonite settlements being formed in the far west at that time. These two periodicals served the church until they were consolidated in 1881 in the *Christlicher Bundesbote* issued under General Conference auspices. This continued until 1947 when it was merged with the Canadian Mennonite weekly, *Der Bote.* In the meantime an English language paper had been started in 1885 by the Eastern District Conference with the name *The Mennonite* and was soon after taken over by the General Conference as the official English medium. Apart from the series of periodicals, publishing of tracts and pamphlets and even books was carried on in a growing fashion under the various printing managements. With the reorganization of 1881, a publication committee was authorized and through its efforts a bookstore was opened in Berne, Indiana, in 1884. This became the church publishing center until the new central offices were set up in Newton, Kansas, in more recent years.

It has been noted that as of 1850 Mennonite immigrants and their descendants were located east of the Mississippi, and that the General Conference organized in 1860 was composed in the main of two elements—a small section of the eighteenth century Mennonite immigrants largely in Pennsyl-

vania and a group of new nineteenth century Mennonite immigrants in the middle states. By 1870 the General Conference had allied with it from these sources eighteen to twenty churches with an over-all membership less than 1500. In the years that were to follow, the Conference has grown to about 250 officially affiliated congregations and some 90 more, indirectly or unofficially related, with a total membership of 50,000. This has come about in part by the growth of congregations and extension of church work in new communities, but it has been more largely due to accretion of member churches from new Mennonite immigrant groups. The Swiss Mennonites in Ohio, Indiana, and Missouri received publicity of the new conference organization but were not then ready to join the move. Between 1870 and 1900 these churches with 1500 members were brought into fellowship largely through the influence of the Wadsworth School and Sunday school interests.

The great immigration of Mennonites from Russia was occurring in the seventies and brought to the United States 10,000 Mennonites to settle west of the Mississippi and 8,000 more to settle in Manitoba. Those in Kansas were immediately drawn into relations with the General Conference. Twelve churches had joined in the first decade and by 1900 twenty more, increasing conference membership by 4,000. More continued to join in succeeding years until they constituted the major part of the General Conference. The Amish immigrants of the nineteenth century held aloof from Mennonite connections and formed their own conference. However, there was a split in their ranks under Joseph Stuckey about 1872 in which a number of churches in Illinois developed the Central Illinois Conference of Mennonites. This group as early as 1898 considered affiliation with the General Conference but decided against it. A close relationship

continued, however, with co-operation in many enterprises and resulted in the entire Central Conference joining the General Conference in 1945 bringing in twenty churches and 3,000 members.

The most recent movement for enlargement of the General Conference is still in process as co-operation and identification is taking place between the Canadian Conference of Mennonites and the General Conference. The number of Canadian provinces from Manitoba to British Columbia and in Ontario include 121 churches, most of which are directly affiliated with the General Conference and which are still growing in numbers and resources.

Organization and Constitution

The General Conference is divided into District Conferences representing territorial and cultural distinctions formerly more distinct than at present. Originally there were two district conferences—the Eastern District, largely Pennsylvania German, descendants of the eighteenth century immigrants, and the Western District, composed of the nineteenth century Swiss immigrants and South Germans. This district was later renamed the Middle District as the Mennonites from Russia filled the prairie states and formed a new Western District across the Mississippi. The district suffered another change in name when, in 1957, these churches merged with the former Central Conference to form a new Central District. The present Western District, Pacific District, and the Northern District are composed of congregations representing Mennonites of Prusso-Russian and Swiss backgrounds who traveled across northern and southern Europe respectively, reaching Russia eventually and then coming to America. Included also are Mennonite immigrants direct from Prussia and from Switzerland as well as elements of Amish and Hutterite ori-

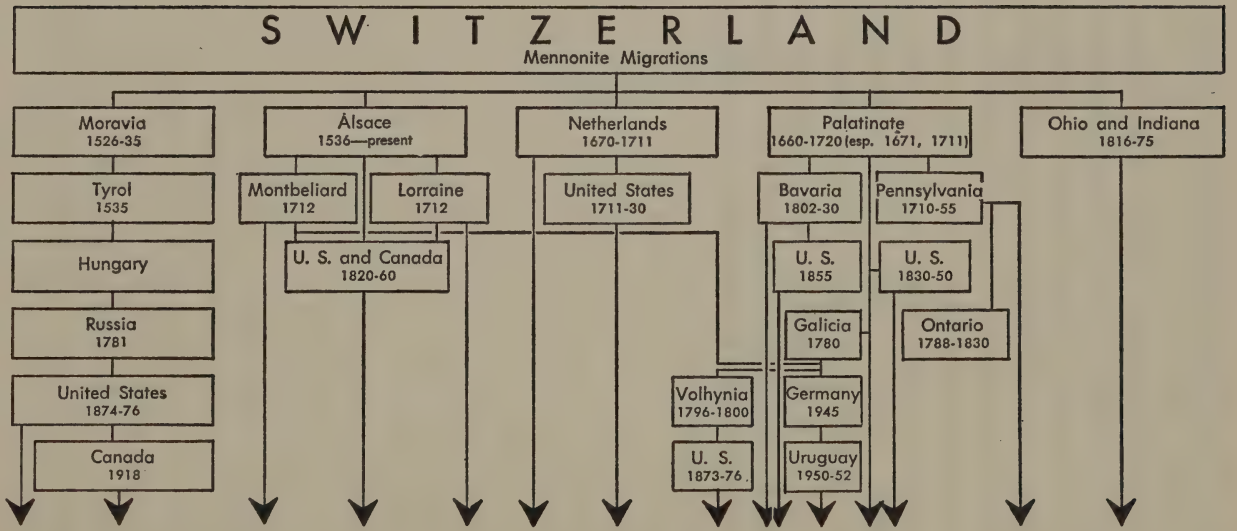
gin. In the Canadian Conference most of the Mennonites are from Russia, those of Manitoba primarily representing the earliest immigration of 1874. Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and in part Ontario representing the immigration following World Wars I and II. Such generalizations have to be qualified as migrations back and forth and even from the United States to Canada have complicated neat formulations.

Little need be said here about the constitution as it is discussed elsewhere. As a matter of fact, it gave the original founders little concern. The 1860 meeting called forth a plan of union written up in six points. These were well enough understood and sufficed for thirty-five years. At first all joint business was considered at the conference sessions and only as occasion arose were committees created. A committee of supervisors was set up for the school in 1863 but was concerned with that only and disbanded with the school closing. In 1872 when a missionary candidate was presented, the Conference found it advisable to designate a mission committee composed of the president, secretary and three other members. Again in 1878 when a merger of the two periodicals serving the Conference was under discussion, a publication committee was authorized to carry out the negotiations. A resolution of 1887 authorized a *Verwaltungskomitee* to administer bequests for conference institutions and when a charter was taken out in 1891, this committee became the trustees specified in the charter. These simple beginnings were crystallized in the first constitution adopted in 1896, which with a major revision in 1929 and again in 1950 still serves the General Conference. The three original boards—Home Mission, Foreign Mission, and Publication—and the Business Committee have expanded to a much more complex

system of boards and committees with executive secretaries and Central Offices' staff.

The most interesting observation in following this story through is the way in which a small group of zealous Christians with an idea were able to pick up associates and under the guidance of God inaugurate a growing work which would never have been foreseen by those involved and how, as this work snowballed, the center of interest shifted to the west with growing numbers and resources not even existing when the move began. It would be interesting to project lines of development as a mathematician does and predict what may happen in another century to complete the story, but we may be sure that the Spirit of God will continue leading and reveal ever new opportunities and developments to those seeking His will.

SWISS MENNONITE MIGRATIONS



The Swiss Join the Conference

By the time the first Mennonites of Swiss ethnic origin reached the American colonies at the beginning of the eighteenth century, many of the German-speaking lands of Europe were unwilling hosts to a hapless group of Swiss Anabaptist refugees. The course of the eighteenth century found a further scattering of them so that by the time the French Revolution swept across Europe, small flocks of Swiss Anabaptists were found from the Bernese Oberland to Friesland, and from Lorraine to Vishenka in the Ukraine. From all of these areas, Mennonites came to America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to find refuge from economic and religious difficulties. Parts of each of these migrations from each of these areas in time became affiliated with the General Conference Mennonite Church so that today the Conference is not only a union of ethnic Dutch and Swiss Anabaptists but a coming together of many diverse groups within the Swiss Anabaptist family that had become so scattered in

Europe. Today it can truly be called a General Conference as the founders envisioned it one hundred years ago.

The various Mennonites of Swiss background that contributed to this story are:

1) Palatine Mennonites came to the colony of Pennsylvania from 1707-1755.
2) Amish from Alsace, Palatinate, and Switzerland came to Pennsylvania, 1720-1755.
3) Swiss Mennonites came to Pennsylvania, 1754-55.
4) Amish from eastern France, including Alsace, Montbeliard, Lorraine and Palatinate came to Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois, 1816-1865.
5) Swiss Mennonites from the Jura, Emmental and Canton Delle, Alsace, came to Ohio, Ontario, Indiana, later to Iowa, Missouri, Oregon and Kansas, 1817-1875.
6) Palatine, Hesse and Bavarian Mennonites came to New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas, 1830-1855.
7) Swiss Volhynian Mennonites came to South Dakota and Kansas, 1874.
8) Swiss Galician Mennonites came to Kansas and Minnesota, 1880-1885.
9) Hutterian Brethren from the Ukraine came to Dakota Territory, 1874-1879.

The Swiss from South Germany

Kriegsheim near Worms gave the first emigrants from the Palatinate to America. In 1685 two brothers, Peter and Isaac Schuhmacher, who had been Mennonites but joined the Society of Friends when Quaker missionaries held meetings among the Mennonites there, settled at Germantown, Pennsylvania, just two years after its founding by the Pietist, Francis Daniel Pastorius. It appears that some of their descendants returned to the Mennonite faith.

In 1707 four sons of Dielman Kolb, Martin, John, Jacob and Henry, left Wolfsheim in the Palatinate and settled in

Germantown, and two years later in Skippach. They became the forerunners of the large migration from the Palatinate that followed. The Kolb family was likely of Swiss origin. The colony along the Skippach had been started in 1702 by Mennonites of North German and Dutch extraction. By 1710 most of the Mennonites settling there were of Swiss ethnic origin. Here in Penn's colony they found religious freedom and the possibility of earning a living free from special taxes. Some of the more important congregations established here were the following: Skippach, Deep Run, Franconia, Salford, Swamp, Plain, Schuylkill, Hereford, Springfield, Rock Hill, Blooming Glen, Upper Milford, and Saucon. The more common family names in this region that denote a Swiss background are: Funk, Stauffer, Ziegler, Roth, Bechtel, Boyer, Moyer, Bergey, Detweiler, Huffman, Bauman, Kolb, Frey, Showalter, Kratz, Oberholtzer, Langenecker, Yoder, Hunsicker, Alderfer, Haldeman, Fretz, High, Geissinger, Hiestand, Souder, etc.

When much of the land was taken in the Franconia-Skippach district, the Mennonite immigrants pushed on west. In 1709 the first Swiss Palatines settled along the Pequae Creek in what is now Lancaster County. This soon became the largest and most important of the Palatine colonies in America. It took little urging for the early settlers to get friends and relatives to join them in Pennsylvania. The years 1709-11 saw the Bernese authorities making a special drive to completely rid their land of Anabaptists. Many went to the Palatinate which aggravated conditions there even more. Families often remained in the Palatinate less than a generation, but usually long enough to take on the Palatinate dialect and customs which they brought along to Pennsylvania. With some American variations, this has come to be known as "Pennsylvania Dutch." Nearly all of present rural

Lancaster County became occupied by Mennonites. Familiar names of families coming to this settlement are: Miller, Graff, Herr, Bowman, Schantz, Weber, Brenneman, Hershey, Brubaker, Baer, Lehman, Witmer, Funk, Shenk, Landes, Huber, Kauffman, Kreider, Eby, Brechbuhl, Burkholder, Stemen, Neff, Reist, Hess, Snavely, Good, Beyer, Musselman, Martin, Ebersole, Wenger, Eschleman, Schellenberger, Mellinger, Risser, Schertz.

The Amish Come

At the time the first Mennonites were arriving in Pennsylvania, the first main division was taking place among the Mennonites in Alsace and Switzerland. Jacob Amman tried to insist that the Mennonites should be more strict in church practices. The main point of disagreement was on the interpretation of avoidance. Amman insisted that the fallen brother be completely shunned by not eating meals with him or having any dealings with him. The opponents felt that the banned one should only be excluded from the communion table.

By 1720 the first followers of Jacob Amman found their way to Pennsylvania shores. This was the family of Barbara Yoder, whose husband died at sea. The first Amish settlers formed a community in Berks and Chester counties and soon in Lancaster County. The following names identify this group: Blauch, Fisher, Troyer, Detweiler, Miller, Mast, Kauffman, Lantz, Schrag, Umble, Stoltzfus, Peachey, Gnaegi, Lapp. Their descendants today who have remained Mennonites are estimated to number well over 200,000. The children and grandchildren of the immigrants became pioneers forming many small communities on the frontier and were a real part of the westward movement of the 18th and 19th centuries. By 1729 they were in Virginia, 1767 in western

Pennsylvania, 1786 in Ontario, 1798 in Ohio, 1838 in Indiana, 1839 in Illinois, 1839 in Iowa, 1863 in Michigan, 1860 in Missouri, 1869 in Kansas, 1890's in Colorado, 1878 in Oregon, etc.

The voyage to America in the small sailing craft of the day was usually an extremely difficult one that was often aggravated by unscrupulous ship captains, heavy seas, and ill-equipped sailing ships. But the move overland by wagon and oxen or horses was little less hazardous. Diseases from undrained swamps claimed many on the frontier. Nor were they exempt from Indian raids. Almost to a man they tilled the soil. This was a hard life of wresting tillable land from the primeval forest and draining it. There was no end to the work to be done. But this was so much more rewarding than it had been in Europe where they were considered as second class citizens and taxed for that privilege.

Swiss Arrivals

The first group of Mennonites directly from Swiss soil for America was a group of about ten families from the district of Courtelary in the Jura in 1754 and 1755. The family names of Brechbuhl, Liechti, Neuenschwander, Engel, Tschantz, Moser, Stauffer, Burkhalter, and König were among this group. They were very poor and had to be helped with their passage by their co-religionists in the Jura. When they arrived in America, they sought out the cheapest soil so some of them wandered out quite far on the frontier. As a result they came into hostile Indian area. The family of König became involved in the Shamokin massacre. The father lost his life and two members of the family were taken captive. The families of this first migration direct from Switzerland joined with the established Mennonite communities, many of them in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. A few of their

descendants now find themselves members of various General Conference churches, especially in the Eastern District.

Only scattered Mennonite families from Switzerland and South Germany found their way to America during the period from 1755 to 1816. This was a period of wars and unsettled conditions in the English colonies which culminated in the American Revolution and later the War of 1812. This period was not conducive to American immigration. The last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade and a half of the nineteenth century were likewise times of unrest in Europe. The French Revolution and the era of Napoleon made conditions especially difficult for nonresistant people and impossible for emigration.

From 1816 to 1860 as many Amish left their homes in Alsace, Montbeliard, Lorraine and the Palatinate as stayed behind. The same can be said for the Swiss Mennonites who had made their homes in the Jura, Emmental, Canton Delle, Alsace, Palatinate, and Hesse. The intolerant position held by the governments toward the Mennonite nonresistant position as well as near impossible economic conditions caused the poor and the conscientious to leave first. Those who remained eventually compromised their nonresistant faith.

The trip to America changed little from the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. There were the same slow sailboats that depended on fickle wind currents; the same money-mad captains who packed the emigrants into poor quarters and furnished poor food, and the same sicknesses that took their toll aboard ship. On arriving in America they sought out their co-religionists who gave them an introduction to the possibilities, outlook and practices of the American Mennonites. Few stayed in the older communities where land was expensive, but rather they moved on to the new government lands in the west, first to western

Pennsylvania and Ohio, later to Indiana, Illinois and on west as the century wore on. Here they wrested homes from the wilderness—swamp, primeval forest, or prairie—and built homes and communities that reflected their religious ideology.

Those of like European backgrounds usually settled together, so that in America there became Swiss Mennonite communities, Alsatian Amish communities, etc. These new immigrants did not always agree completely with their American Mennonite brethren in things religious. A century apart brought changes in the experiences and thinking of both groups. Sometimes this led to bitter controversies, while more often there was a quiet parting of ways, or an incomplete union.

Nineteenth Century Migration

Jacob Schrag departed from his Jura home in Switzerland in 1816 and settled in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. The following year his parents, together with Brand, Augsburger and Nussbaumer families, came. They wrote to their many friends and relatives of the great possibilities on the frontier. The response was great and soon a nucleus of Swiss Mennonites was found in Wayne County, Ohio. By 1833 a settlement was started in Putnam County, Ohio, by Jura Mennonites who had gone across the Swiss border to Canton Delle, France. Jura Mennonites formed the first Mennonite settlement in Indiana in Adams and Wells counties. Later Jura and Emmental immigrants augmented the numbers of the community. In 1849 a community was formed in Polk County, Iowa, and in 1869 a settlement was made near Versailles, Missouri. In the 1890's a settlement was made near Silverton, Oregon. These Swiss were considerably more conservative than their American Mennonite brethren, so did not join in their con-

ferences but rather held periodic ministers' meetings of their own.

The Polk County, Iowa, Swiss became the first to become affiliated with the General Conference when they sent delegates as early as 1860. Through the influence of the Wadsworth Institute staff and students, a majority of the Adams County, Indiana, Swiss in 1872 and a minority of those in Wayne County, Ohio, in 1887 joined the General Conference. The majority of the Putnam County, Ohio, community joined in 1893. Some of the most common names of these Swiss Mennonite settlers are: Lugenbuhl, Amstutz, Badertscher, Basinger, Steiner, Diller, Augsburger, Schumacher, Gilliom, Tschantz, Lehman, Gerber, Geiger, Welty, Bixel, Neuenschwander, Althaus, Baumgartner, Bucher, Burkholder, Hilty, Habegger, Klay, Liechty, Moser, Sommer, Nussbaum, Oberly, Suter, Schnegg, Sprunger, Stauffer, Zurfluh, and Zingg.

Later Swiss settlements were formed in 1873 near Pulaski, Iowa, and in 1883 near Whitewater, Kansas. These both became affiliated with the General Conference.

Crowded conditions leaving scant possibility of earning a livelihood, together with the growing rise of nationalism which had little room for nonresistant Christians within its ideology, made emigration imperative to many of the Mennonites in the Palatinate. It is estimated that about fifty families arrived in America from the Palatinate from 1831 to 1855. Some came from a settlement made in Bavaria by Palatinate Mennonites not many years before.

The pioneer immigrant of the group was Jacob Krehbiel, from Weierhof near Bolanden in the Palatinate who came in 1831 and settled near Clarence Center, New York. A small congregation was formed there as well as in Ashland County, Ohio, in 1833. These both became affiliated with the General Conference. Other colonies were located in quick succession

in Lee County, Iowa, and Summerfield, Illinois. The Lee County, Iowa, churches were members of the General Conference from its inception while Summerfield, Illinois, joined in 1861. The Ashland County, Ohio, congregation joined in 1866 and Clarence Center, New York, in 1884.

The common names found among these immigrants are: Krehbiel, Ruth, Leisy, Haury, Risser, Hirschler, Schowalter, Pletcher, Baer, Dester, Ellenberger, Loewenberg, and Eyman.

About one hundred Mennonites from Hesse-Darmstadt settled in Butler County, Ohio, in the 1830's near an Alsatian Amish community that had been founded some ten or more years before. Some also located in Waterloo County, Ontario. Some time later members of these communities moved to Putnam County, Illinois, and some to McLean County, Illinois. Not being able to affiliate with existing Mennonite or Amish congregations in each of these communities, they founded their own churches.

The Illinois churches became a part of the Central Illinois Mennonite Conference. Common names among these Mennonites are: Nafziger, Kennel, Kutzi, Burcky, Jordy, Kistler, Unzicker. In this same wave of migration, Amish arrived from Alsace, Lorraine, the Saar, Montbeliard and also the Jura. The leader of this migration was Christian Augsburger, an Alsatian who decided on Butler County, Ohio, for his future home in 1818. Others followed the next year. This settlement became a convenient stopping off place for later Amish immigrants who usually went on west to Illinois. These churches became the nucleus for the Central Illinois Mennonite Conference when under the leadership of Joseph Stuckey it was founded as a break with the Amish. In 1947 they united with the General Conference and in 1957 they became a part of the Central District Conference.

Distinctive names found among the nineteenth century

Amish immigrants are: Nafziger, Schertz, Bachman, Gerber, Stuckey, Schrock, Wagler, Springer, Augsberger, Gascho, Oesch, Rockey, Rupp, Ramseyer, Oyer, Albrecht, Burckey, Bender, Bechler, Egley, Fahrney, Gundy, Gingerich, Holly, Imhoff, Iutzi, Kennel, Kinsinger, Klopfenstein, Litwiller, Mosiman, Neuhauser, Roth, Ruvenacht, Raber, Rediger, Sommer, Smith, Slagel, Swartzendruber, Salzman, Strubhar, Stahley, Slabaugh, Streit, Werkler, Wise, and Zehr.

The Volhynians and Galicians

Emigration to America was impossible during the American Revolution. Nevertheless, the various religious, social and economic pressures on the Swiss Mennonites living in Germany and Switzerland demanded that at least some must find new homes. Emperor Joseph II, ruler of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, invited colonists to his newly acquired province of Galicia. Of the 3,300 German families who heeded this call were some thirty Mennonite ones. Between 1782 and 1789 six Swiss Mennonite families from the Palatinate settled south of Lemberg, the capital of Galicia. In 1786 a group of eighteen settled nearby. Some came in 1791 from Montbeliard, Alsace. A group moved on to Eduardsdorf in Volhynia, Polish Russia. During the next decade they formed several settlements in the area. During 1874 nearly all the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites migrated to America. Andreas Schrag, who was sent by them the year before to investigate possibilties in America, led the first group of ten families to near Freeman, South Dakota. Other large settlements were made near Moundridge and Pretty Prairie, Kansas. The churches that they founded soon joined the General Conference.

Prominent names of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites are:

Kauffman, Goering, Schrag, Rupp, Stucky, Miller, Flickinger, Krehbiel and Graber.

Many of the Mennonites who remained in Galicia prospered. Subsidiary settlements were founded. When the conscription law was passed they became concerned about their religious principles. Seventy-five families, approximately half of the settlement, emigrated to America from 1873 to 1883. They formed settlements at Arlington and Hanston, Kansas; Butterfield and Westbrook, Minnesota; and Perry, Oklahoma. Common names among these settlers are: Bachmann, Linscheid, Rupp, Miller and Ewy. Soon after the organization of these churches, they became affiliated with the General Conference. Those who remained in Galicia were quite prosperous financially but lost much of their spiritual heritage. The settlements were in the battle zone of World Wars I and II. With the German retreat in 1945 they fled to Western Germany. Some went to Canada and Uruguay.

The Hutterian Brethren

Another strain of blood, though remotely Swiss, has been added to the already complex General Conference Mennonite background. These are the seven congregations in South Dakota that come from a Hutterian background. This branch of Anabaptism had its inception in Moravia in 1528 only a few years after the movement began in 1525. Swiss Anabaptist refugees who found themselves in dire straits pooled their resources to exist and thus formed a Christian communistic experiment patterned after the early church in Jerusalem. They thrived in Slavic Moravia and here developed a remarkable literature and culture, living in colonies (Bruderhöfe) as a large Christian family, working together as one economic unit. Jakob Hutter joined the group in 1529 and gave much direction to the entire movement. They carried

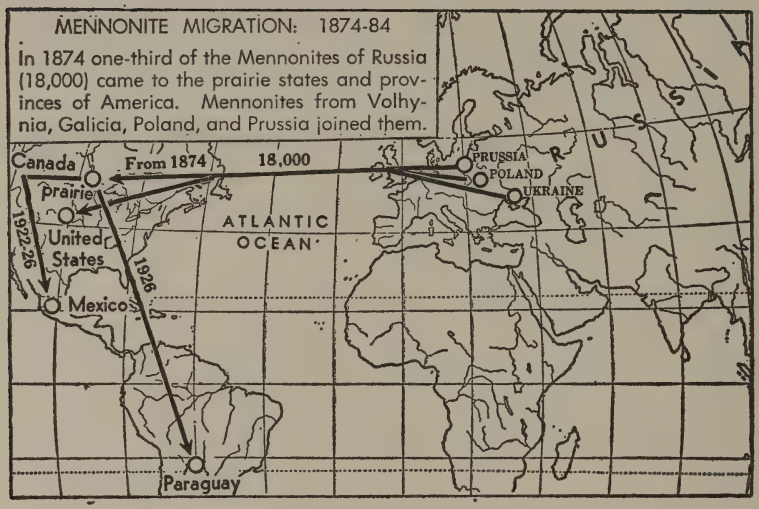
on active missionary work and gathered in some 70,000 souls at over eighty colonies in Moravia by the end of the 16th century. In 1622 they were driven from Moravia. Those who remained true to their faith went to Hungary and Transylvania. Most, however, remained and after a long struggle compromised their faith. Eventually they became Catholic, although much longer they retained their community of goods. These people were known as Habaner. The Hutterians had dwindled to only thirty or forty in Transylvania. They gained numerous converts here. Finally they yielded to the pressure of the Jesuits and left Transylvania in 1767 for Walachia. Because of the Turkish War they left in three years. In 1770 they were given protection in the Ukraine by General Count Rumyantsov who offered them asylum on his own estate near Vishenka. In 1802 the colony moved to Radichev, some ten miles north. They joined the Mennonites of Russia and Poland and emigrated to the Dakota Territory, settling near Yankton, South Dakota.

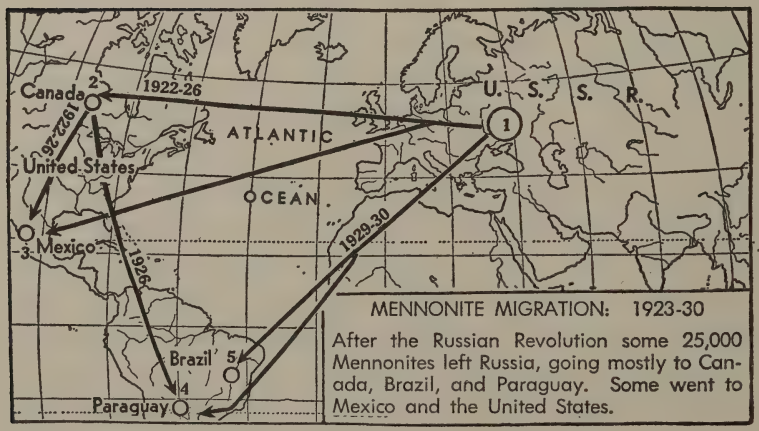
By the time that the Hutterians migrated to America, some of them no longer practiced the community of goods. These non-colony people joined the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren and the General Conference. Seven congregations of the General Conference in South Dakota have this background. Common names among these people are: Waldner, Wipf, Wolliman, Hofer, Entz, Decker, Glanzer, Gross, Kleinsasser, Wurz, and Tschetter.

Though Swiss in background, most of the Mennonites who went to America from other areas than Switzerland represented the culture of the area from which they migrated. Within a generation the cultural change would take place and Swiss would become Alsatians or Hessians. Those that settled in Europe in non-German areas did better in retaining their culture and language.

On coming to America each national group retained its identity for many years. They were still Alsatian Amish and Swiss Mennonites even though they took on new conference affiliations. Slowly, but surely, these old divisions are being forgotten. Languages and customs brought from their European homes are slipping into the realms of the curious. Much of this is due to the many activities, especially for the youth, that cut across these old ethnic lines, and even across conference borders. In this way there is continually a blending of backgrounds and customs which makes for a greater unity among all Mennonites the goal toward which John H. Oberholtzer worked many years ago.

Russian Mennonite Migrations





Prusso-Russian Mennonites Join the Conference

In 1788 the movement of Mennonites from Danzig and West Prussia to Russia began. They went there on the basis of a definite understanding with the Russian crown. Most dear to their hearts was the promise that they as well as their descendants would be exempted from all military service.

Russia, Poland and Prussia

By 1870 the rumors spread in Mennonite circles that the government was considering the introduction of a new military law for the country and that the Mennonites too might be affected. In consequence a Mennonite deputation was sent to St. Petersburg to find out the intentions of the government. It soon became evident that their privileged position would come to an end in the very near future. Mennonites, like everybody else, would have to render military service, although in special non-combatant units of the army.

It also became evident that in the future Mennonites would

not be able to continue a complete separation from the culture of their adopted country. The Russian language would have to be introduced into Mennonite schools and those who wished to receive a better education would have to be introduced to Russian culture in general. This, many feared, would lead to a complete eventual Russianization. To many it seemed that the only way to escape these two dreaded eventualities was emigration from Russia.

But where could they go? Which country could and would grant them what they desired? It was suggested that America, the United States and Canada, might be able and willing to do this. Contacts were established partly through Cornelius Jansen, Berdyansk, and William Hespeler, a Canadian immigrant agent. Enthusiasm for the promised land was strengthened by the reports of four young men who in 1872 had made a trip through the western states and who had visited various centers of American Mennonite communities in the Middle West as well as in Pennsylvania. One of the group, Bernhard Warkentin, remained in America. His favorable reports created great interest.

In the summer of 1873 a delegation representing various Mennonite groups and the small Hutterite body in Russia, as well as representatives from Poland and Prussia, sailed for America in search for land suitable for colonization. During the first stages of their journey through the Mennonite settlements in the East, they travelled in three groups and independently of each other. On July 9 they met in Fargo, North Dakota. From here on they traveled as one group, accompanied by several prominent American Mennonites as well as representatives of the government and of several railroad companies.

They inspected the land about Fargo and then sailed down the Red River to Winnipeg. Here they were presented to

the provincial government. The Minister of Public Works arranged for a tour through a government reservation.

Before long most of the delegates decided that Manitoba was not a satisfactory place to recommend to their people; only the Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde delegates decided to enter into negotiations with the government. Since these delegates represented the poorer and also more conservative settlements in Russia, they were no doubt especially impressed by the free lands in Manitoba as well as by the absolute guarantee of military exemption, both of these conditions being less favorable in the United States than in Canada. The Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde delegates eventually decided to recommend Manitoba to their brethren for settlement.

The other delegates inspected land in Minnesota, Nebraska, while some went to Kansas and Texas. By the middle of August the delegates again met in New York in time to sail on August 20.

The delegates were unanimous in recommending emigration; all, except the delegates of Bergthal and the Kleine Gemeinde, were agreed that they would not recommend Manitoba in spite of the fact that this province had offered very liberal terms and the United States could make few promises with reference to either exemption from military service or reservation of compact land areas, though an effort to obtain such promise was made.

During the winter of 1873-74 various bills were introduced in the Lower House and in the Senate purporting to secure for the prospective Mennonite settlers the setting aside of compact land areas. These bills met with opposition since settling in compact groups would tend to perpetuate distinction of speech, religion, nationality and social customs. This the government did not favor and because of this, these bills were not passed; no legislation guaranteeing special rights

to Mennonites materialized. In spite of this, the majority of the immigrants from Russia came to the United States; the smaller part went to Canada where their wishes had been met most generously by the the Federal government.

The Great Trek

The delegates upon their return to Russia enthusiastically reported that in the United States and Canada land could be had in any quantity and on easy terms with an assurance of religious freedom in both of these countries. Many began to make preparations for the trek to the promised land; their farms were offered for sale. The oversupply of farms offered for sale brought down the price to a mere fraction of their actual worth. The securing of the necessary passport permitting emigration from the country was another difficult problem. Passports often were withheld for months at a time and when finally given, they proved to be costly. In spite of these difficulties, whole villages and colonies were determined to leave the country.

The Russian government, reluctant to lose so many of its best farmers, made an effort to persuade them to stay. Liberal concessions were made and accepted by the majority of the Mennonites, but a strong minority was unwilling to make any compromise with their conscience. These were in the main the more conservative groups and individuals.

The Mennonites of the Ukraine were soon joined by those of Polish Russia who were confronting the same conscription laws and by some from Prussia who objected to the recently introduced general conscription law. The larger number of Mennonites from Poland migrated to the United States while only a small group from Prussia went. The Mennonites from Poland settled in Kansas and South Dakota, and those from Prussia near Whitewater and Elbing, Kansas, and Bea-

trice, Nebraska, while some went to Saskatchewan, Canada.

The following are some of the reasons why the Mennonites migrated to North America:

1) General conscription was to be introduced.
2) Mennonite schools were to be placed under the direct control of the Russian government.
3) The Russian language was to be henceforth the main, although not the exclusive language of instruction. It was felt that the program of Russianization would make it impossible to retain the Mennonite heritage.
4) For the landless and for many others, the offer of free or cheap land was a great attraction.

It must be understood that even if all these factors contributed to the decision to emigrate, the main and by far the most decisive motive was religious.

Individuals and small groups had been leaving Russia since 1873, but large groups began to leave in the summer of 1874. Often such groups constituted much more than a religious unit; they were an economic and social group as well. They took care of their poor, assisting them and even paying their passage; they also took care of their orphans and widows. Debts and mutual obligations were transferred to their new homes and all this was done in complete unanimity and harmony. The immigration movement continued uninterrupted during the next few years to 1879, but the largest rush was during the first two years.

We do not know the exact number of Mennonite immigrants during those years, but it is generally held that about 18,000 had come; of these about 10,000 located in the United States and 8,000 within Manitoba. The transfer of such a large body from one continent to another and the settlement of the same upon wild and untenanted prairie lands could not be accomplished without heartache, hardship and many sacrifices.

Meanwhile the American Mennonites had established various committees to assist the needy and to give help and advice where necessary. Great sums of money, the total running possibly around $100,000, had been contributed and spent for these newcomers. It should be remembered that the American Mennonites who were giving this help were of Swiss origin, and, therefore, ethnically of a somewhat different background than the newcomers. Their reason for helping obviously was only Christian compassion and spiritual solidarity. May we ever imitate this splendid example.

The Settlement in the United States

The largest and most important group settled in Kansas. The land usually was bought at a price from $2.50 to $5 per acre, and only after a thorough investigation, as evidenced by the fact that most Mennonite settlements are situated in the very heart of the best agricultural lands of Kansas. Some, like the Alexanderwohl group north of Newton, tried at first to reconstruct their economic and social life as much as possible upon the Russian model, but it was soon found that the American custom had advantages and so in the course of a few years the American way of housebuilding and farm arrangement was generally accepted.

The newcomers rapidly organized into congregations, and those of similar conviction joined in the Kansas Conference. The first session was held in December, 1877; ten churches were represented by seventy delegates. Thereafter annual meetings of the Conference were held.

The Conference largely concerned itself with educational matters. Since the American educational system more or less disregarded religion, the Mennonites found it wanting. To remedy matters they decided to supervise district schools where possible, or where this would not be feasible, to establish

separate parochial schools. The study of English was recommended in order to foster better social relations with the American neighbors as well as to be able to extend the Kingdom of God among the English-speaking population. The first secondary school, *Fortbildungsschule,* was established in 1882. The aim was to train teachers for district and parochial schools and to prepare mission workers. Eventually this school developed into the present-day Bethel College.

By the end of the eighties it became evident to the Kansas Conference, as well as to the General Conference, that their activities were so closely similar as to warrant a closer association. Some of the twenty Kansas congregations already had joined the General Conference. In 1891 the Kansas Conference became the Western District Conference.

In Minnesota the lovely Mountain Lake region particularly appealed to the newcomers. Many bought improved farms in this region, and this fact prevented them from grouping themselves into the traditional villages. The American way triumphed here right from the beginning. About three hundred families settled in Minnesota, and Mountain Lake became the center of their settlement.

The first two decades were very difficult for these settlers. They too had to experience most of the hardships that pioneers often are subjected to, such as severe winters, dry or too wet summers, blight, rust and the grasshopper plague. Eventually though their perseverance triumphed over all these difficulties and economic progress began to smile upon them.

Most of the settlers originated from the Molotschna area in South Russia, but coming as they did from various localities with varying background, they found it difficult at first to form church associations readily. Several congregations eventually were formed. In 1890 the first church from Minnesota, the Bethel Mennonite Church, joined the General

Conference. In the next few years two more congregations followed suit, and the remaining three affiliated between 1917 and 1923.

About two hundred families located in the southeastern part of Dakota either on homesteads or on slightly improved farms. The nearest railway station was from 30 to 50 miles away. The Dakota settlers too had great difficulties the first years caused by prairie fires, grasshoppers and cold winters. Some of the settlers were very poor. Progress was slow, but by 1899 the last of the original immigrant congregations, except for the Hutterite congregations which have affiliated in very recent years, had joined the General Conference.

Cornelius Jansen and his son Peter settled near Beatrice, Nebraska, and so did about three hundred other families from Russia and Prussia. They settled mostly on virgin prairie and those at Jansen at first built in the traditional village pattern. The congregations at Beatrice and Henderson joined the General Conference.

We notice that in a comparatively brief period of time most of the Mennonite congregations, recently migrating from Europe and whose persuasion permitted them to do so, had joined the General Conference. This affiliation had been furthered by a few individuals such as Christian Krehbiel, David Goerz and Bernhard Warkentin.

No one is able to give exact numbers of churches and members of these western Mennonites, but the following table based on statistics collected in 1910 shows the number of congregations and members of the Russian Mennonites that had joined the General Conference after a generation in America.

	Number of Churches	*Number of Members*
Kansas	49	4,972
Minnesota	3	362

Nebraska	3	707
Dakotas	8	737
	63	6,778

The Beginning in Manitoba

The first group of Mennonites arrived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, at that time a frontier post, in 1874. From here they proceeded to their reservation. The great majority of them decided to settle in villages, similar in arrangement to their villages in Russia, and consisting of fifteen to twenty families each. Very primitive houses were erected. Some were dug partly in the earth and partly above ground with a sod roof; others were crude shelters made of pine or poplar saplings from the nearby groves and lined with sod; a few were built entirely of logs.

The first winter was one of great hardship for both men and beasts. The cold was intense, the homes poor and the prairie grass cut for feed contained little nourishment for their stock. The spring was late and the summer brought myriads of grasshoppers. Appeals for help had to be made to the Canadian government as well as to the Mennonites of the East. Both sources responded liberally.

During the next years more settlers kept arriving; more villages were founded and more land was broken. Up to this time it had been thought impractical to make a settlement on the open prairie; it was felt that proximity of woodland was necessary. The Mennonites were the first settlers in Canada to prove that it was possible to found homes on the prairies as well as in or near woodlands.

In 1875 the settlers had been lent $96,400 by the Canadian government. By 1891 this sum, plus the interest, a total of $130,386.58, was repaid. This fact more than anything else

demonstrated the progress of the settlement and the industriousness and honesty of its settlers.

From the very beginning the settlers organized into congregations. Must of them though were exceedingly conservative, but several of the more progressive churches in 1902 united as the "Konferenz der Mennoniten im Mittleren Canada." The beginning was small and humble indeed; about fifteen delegates were present at the first meeting in 1903 representing two congregations. It would take years before some of the Canadian congregations were ready to affiliate with the General Conference, but eventually this is what did happen. At the Conference in 1913 it was suggested for the first time that the Canadian Conference should delegate representatives to the session of the General Conference. No action was taken though. Some Saskatchewan congregations had already affiliated with the General Conference. World War I and the following influx of thousands of new immigrants to Canada led to many changes within the Canadian Conference.

After World War I

About one-third of the Mennonite body had left Russia in the seventies. The remaining two-thirds, about 37,000, became more and more integrated into the complex structure of a modern advanced civilization. The Mennonite population grew rapidly and by 1915 there were 104,000 Mennonites in Russia. An excellent Mennonite school system had been developed; many young Mennonites attended advanced institutions of learning; their young men served in the Forestry Service and to their surprise Mennonites found that all this was not detrimental to their spiritual life.

Economically the Mennonites of Russia prospered, but when in 1918 the Bolsheviks came to power, this fact as well

as the Christian ideology and the democratic outlook of the Mennonites made them appear to be enemies of the state. Many lost their liberty and thousands their lives. So, when during the years 1923 to 1929 there was some semblance of freedom in Russia and emigration was possible, approximately 25,000 Mennonites left Soviet Russia; of these about 21,000 came to Canada, and possibly one thousand to the United States. The remaining went to South America.

The newcomers in Canada spread from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Coast. Many new settlements originated. Eventually many of these people drifted to towns and cities. Mennonite congregations were organized in places where hitherto the name "Mennonite" had been unknown. The greater number of these congregations immediately joined the existing Canadian Conference and also the General Conference. Since the doors of the United States were closed to any large scale immigration and particularly to immigration from Soviet Russia during this period, only a comparatively small number of Mennonites succeeded in entering it. Most of them joined the existing Mennonite communities.

World War II brought changes for millions of people. In Europe it uprooted all Mennonite settlements between the Vistula and the Volga. Over 7,000 of these displaced Mennonites succeeded in coming to Canada. Here meanwhile conditions had changed very much. Gone were the days when solid new settlements could be established; in fact, only the smaller part of these newcomers was able to settle on farms, the greater part settled in towns and cities where they found employment. None of these were able to establish completely new congregations, but most of them joined existing congregations.

As stated, some of the Canadian congregations had organized in 1902 as a conference. It steadily has been growing

and at present it has 17,508 members (1958). The majority of the congregations belonging to the Canadian Conference have also joined the General Conference. The Canadian membership in the latter in 1955 was 12,810. It seems to the writer that the time is not far away when all Canadian congregations who are members in the Canadian Conference will also be members of the General Conference. The Canadian constituency, being numerically the second largest in the General Conference, will in course of time contribute and participate directly, more and more.

Not only the Canadian Mennonites, particularly those who came from Russia since World War I, have joined the General Conference Mennonite Church, but also many of those who went to Paraguay and Brazil. The Mennonite congregations of Fernheim, Friesland, Neuland and Volendam and the Witmarsum and Curitiba congregations of Brazil have joined. The Danzig and Prussian Mennonites who settled in Uruguay since World War II have also become members of the General Conference Mennonite Church. There is also a congregation at Cuauhtemoc, Chih., in Mexico.

Thus we see that the greater part of the Mennonites who, between the years 1870 and 1959, had come to North and South America from Russia have joined the General Conference. More than two-thirds of all the members of the Conference are of this background. Conceivably such a large group must have influenced the development and the polity of the Conference greatly.

Some of the most common names of the Mennonites of this background most of which have been transplanted from the Netherlands to West Prussia, Poland and Russia and ultimately to North and South America are: Penner, Wiebe, Wiens, Dyck, Claassen, Klassen, Pauls, Harder, Bartel, Buller, Janzen, Epp, Ewert, Friesen, Regier, Regehr, Warkentin, Goertz, Klie-

wer, Schroeder, Schmidt, Neufeld, Martens, Duerksen, Toews, Hamm, Willms, Harms, Balzer, Unruh, etc.

It is interesting to note that a number of factors are working for the complete union of the two original ethnical groups—the Swiss and the Russo-German—who furnished the main stock for the Conference. It could not have been otherwise. Better means of communication and transportation have brought these groups in closer contact and led to better understanding of each other; the sojourn of the young people from both groups at Mennonite institutions of higher learning in Mennonite Central Committee undertakings affords the opportunities to get acquainted and in some cases leads to a union for life. Be it so!

The Conference Organized for Work

The General Conference did not start with a ready-made plan or organization. The pattern of organization developed as the need arose. The general character of that organization and the direction of its development was, however, determined largely by the early leaders of the movement. They were men of deep Christian conviction, high ideals, clear purpose and a compelling sense of mission.

Their experiences under a prevailing authoritarian type of church government heightened their appreciation of the democratic spirit in church relationships, organizations and institutions. They felt hampered by the traditionalism of the time and the rigidity of the church. Out of this grew their emphasis on flexibility in church government and on tolerance in their relationships toward others. The lack of system and planning in church affairs made them keenly conscious of the need for orderly procedure in church and conference matters. The absence of a real sense of mission stirred them

to a zeal for missions that could not be denied. The need for trained workers in a task so large challenged them to establish Christian schools for the training of its young people.

The Founding of the Conference

It was concerns like these that drew some Mennonite congregations together for a conference at West Point, Iowa, on May 28, 1860. They hoped that they might find ways of drawing all Mennonite congregations together into a voluntary brotherhood united by love, a common faith and a missionary passion. Closely related was the hope that together they might establish a school to meet their common needs. Clearly it was not organization as such or unity for unity's sake that they desired. They sought to realize among Mennonites Jesus' prayer, "that they may be one" and Paul's plea for "unity of the spirit."

This is clearly reflected in the early pattern of organization. They did not start with a formal statement of doctrine as if to compel uniformity. They did indeed affirm their adherence to basic evangelical scriptural faith and to essential principles of Mennonitism. But they urged at the same time a sympathetic understanding of the beliefs of others and faith in their sincerity. Not uniformity but unity with diversity was their goal. The values of Christian freedom were to be maintained.

From the first they were deeply concerned that the local congregation retain maximum freedom to manage its own affairs whatever co-operative arrangement they might set up. In order to make this possible, they adopted as their motto: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things love." In line with this it was also decided that the Conference should have an advisory rather than a legislative function.

The new organization was conceived of as a conference of congregations. The unit of membership was, therefore, the local congregation. Membership was open to any congregation subscribing to Mennonite principles and to the general confession of faith as set forth in the conference statement. The system of representation at conference sessions (one representative to every 30 church members or fraction thereof) opened the way for both minister and lay delegates. This tended to preserve the democratic spirit.

The Conference Organization

The earliest conference organization was the simplest possible. It consisted of a chairman, John H. Oberholtzer, and a secretary, Christian Schowalter. Apparently they had no conference treasurer. Contributions of congregations, primarily for missions, were forwarded to an "eastern" and a "western" treasurer.

These officers were elected at the beginning of each session. They took office immediately and functioned until the next session. A "business committee," appointed for conference sessions, supervised the order of business. The first three sessions of the Conference were held in 1860, 1861, and 1863. At the 1863 conference sessions the present triennial system was adopted.

The concern for missions and for a school found expression at the very first session of the Conference. At the second session, 1861, Daniel Hege was elected as traveling minister. He was to visit the congregations for the purpose of quickening their spiritual life and especially to stimulate interest in the cause of missions and a school.

At the 1863 session, after prolonged discussion, the principles and regulations that would govern the organization, life and support of the proposed new school were adopted.

Noteworthy in this constitution is the anticipation that general liberal arts and science courses would in time be taught in this school. Interesting also is a provision that students shall engage in physical labor, three hours each day, in the interest of their physical and mental health. The deep concern of the Conference was that the school, whatever its future development, remain thoroughly Christian, firmly built on the one foundation, Jesus Christ. Especially keen was the desire that the school train missionaries and ministers for the larger outreach of the church. Over-all responsibility for the administration of the school was entrusted to a committee of three supervisors appointed by the Conference. They were directly responsible to the Conference since this was definitely a conference school. The school opened its doors to students January 2, 1868, with a faculty of three and a student body of 24 young men. Christian Schowalter served as principal. Courses in German, theology, literature and science were offered. The following year the Conference called as teacher of theology C. J. van der Smissen of Germany.

Internal tensions and financial difficulties caused this school to close in 1878. But it made a truly remarkable contribution to the life and future course of the Conference. Early leaders of the Conference and pastors of churches like N. B. Grubb, A. S. Shelly, A. M. Fretz, S. F. Sprunger, William Galle and J. S. Hirschler, to mention only a few, came out of this school. It also trained pioneer missionaries like S. S. Haury, first worker among the Cheyenne Indians in Oklahoma, and H. R. Voth, pioneer worker among the Hopi Indians in Arizona. Other Wadsworth alumni were J. B. Baer, able home missionary who for many years served scattered Mennonite church groups, and I. A. Sommer, for many years editor of the conference paper, *Christlicher Bundesbote.*

The Constitution

The Conference adopted no formal constitution until its fourteenth session held in the Alexanderwohl Church, Goessel, Kansas, in October, 1896. The need for it apparently grew out of a discussion of the confession of faith at the 1890 session held in Childstown, South Dakota. A committee was appointed at this session consisting of A. B. Shelly, Christian Schowalter, David Goerz and S. F. Sprunger, who were to draft a constitution for consideration by the next session of Conference.

The next session of the Conference in 1893 at Bluffton, Ohio, considered their submission and then asked the committee to prepare another constitution. The 1896 session debated at length on the question whether the Conference was to continue to be a purely advisory body as originally designed or whether it should also possess legislative power. The decision was to adhere to the original pattern and this principle governed the provisions of the new constitution.

This constitution has four main sections. Section I was a brief historical sketch of the Conference. Section II, church regulation with paragraphs on: (1) Our Common Confession; (2) Admissions; (3) Secret Societies; (4) Temperance; (5) The Confession Unalterable; (6) The Rights of Congregations Inviolable; (7) Ordination of Evangelists and Missionaries. Section III, business regulations which details under A, the duties of the Board of Trustees (nine members) as the legal representatives of the Conference, in accordance with the charter of incorporation. The incorporation, authorized by the 1890 session, had been consummated under the date of September 5, 1891, under the laws of Kansas with Newton and Halstead designated as places of business.

Under B the constitution spelled out membership rights, organization and election procedures, rights of appeal and

time of meetings. The conference officers were to be president, vice-president, secretary. The treasurer of the Board of Trustees was to serve as treasurer for general expenses of the Conference.

The Boards

The more detailed work of the Conference, this section specified, was to be administered through the Board of Home Missions, the Board of Foreign Missions and the Board of Publication, each to consist of six members and the Business Committee consisting of three members. The term of office was nine years but so staggered that a third of them would be elected each triennium.

Interesting was the provision for a "statistical secretary" and for "temporary" and "standing" committees. Each board had its own treasurer and each was responsible for securing its own funds. The conference officers had very limited responsibilities between sessions, largely limited to filling vacancies on boards or committees.

This first constitution was thoroughly rewritten and revised in 1929. Most of this was in the nature of editorial rearrangement in the interest of clarity and logical order. An important purpose, however, was to embody in its provisions measures approved earlier by conference action. Most significant among these additions to the constitution was the provision for an "Executive Committee." This action had already been authorized by the 1920 conference session. This committee was to carry administrative responsibility for the work of the Conference between triennial sessions.

Six boards were recognized in the 1929 constitution, namely: the Board of Trustees, the Board of Home Missions, the Board of Foreign Missions, the Board of Education, the Board of Emergency Relief, and the Board of Publication. Each of

these boards had its own treasurer. Chief among the standing committees was the Business Committee whose primary responsibilities were appointing the conference nominating committee, planning the program for the Conference and supervising the order of business at conference sessions.

The period following the 1929 conference sessions was marked by a considerable enlargement of the service program. Added responsibilities arising from this were generally entrusted to special committees appointed for particular purposes. They started as temporary committees but tended to become permanent.

The Revised Constitution

This multiplication of committees together with the challenge of new opportunities made necessary a thorough restudy of the whole conference structure. It resulted in the appointment of a co-ordinating committee composed of a representative from each of the conference boards plus some members-at-large. This committee was to undertake a thorough study of the conference structure, define areas of responsibility and simplify, co-ordinate, and streamline the conference organization and recommend a constitution embodying the suggested changes.

The committee took its work seriously. In a study that covered more than two trienniums, it examined carefully the total conference enterprise in order to discover how to organize for efficient administration of the whole program of service. Important in this investigation was a careful examination of the conference organizations of both Mennonite and non-Mennonite groups. On the basis of these studies it drew up a skeleton organization and submitted it to the various conference boards for critical evaluation and suggestion. After repeated checking and rechecking with the boards,

the committee submitted a new constitution for consideration to the 1950 Conference. After extensive debate this constitution was adopted with only minor changes.

Noteworthy changes in this constitution were the following:

1. Change of the name from "The General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America" to "The General Conference Mennonite Church."
2. Consolidation of existing boards and committees under four major boards: Board of Missions, Board of Christian Service, Board of Education and Publication, Board of Business Administration. These boards, each composed of 12 members, organize themselves into separate committees to take care of special functions of board responsibility. The boards have the privilege of appointing to committee membership persons with training and experience.
3. Provision for the Council of Boards, an advisory body composed of board members, conference officers and district presidents. Its purpose is "to provide clearance for common problems, to review the work of the Conference as a total effort, and to decide on budgets of boards and elected committees."
4. Specific provision for a central office for the Conference, for executive secretaries of boards and especially for a central treasurer handling all conference funds.
5. Provision for a closer co-operative relationship between the General Conference and district conferences.
6. Provision whereby a conference of Mennonite congregations can affiliate with the General Conference in its program of service and fellowship. (Heretofore only individual congregations could apply for membership in the Conference.)

The accompanying graphs illustrate the structure of the Conference under the 1929 constitution and under the 1950 constitution. (See pages 70 and 71.)

The District Conferences

District conferences were organized on the initiative of congregations located within a convenient distance from one

another. The number of congregations belonging to a district conference grew as new churches came into being and as older churches sought relationships with district Mennonite churches. The purpose of these district organizations was fellowship, mutual assistance and co-operation in common tasks and needs.

The Eastern District composed of congregations in eastern Pennsylvania was organized in 1847. Outstanding early projects were the publication of the *Religiöser Botschafter* which was later renamed *Das Christliche Volksblatt* and then *Der Mennonitische Friedensbote.* With the changeover to the English language *The Mennonite* was started. Other early publication ventures included a catechism. Sunday school work was started in 1847 and a mission society organized in 1866.

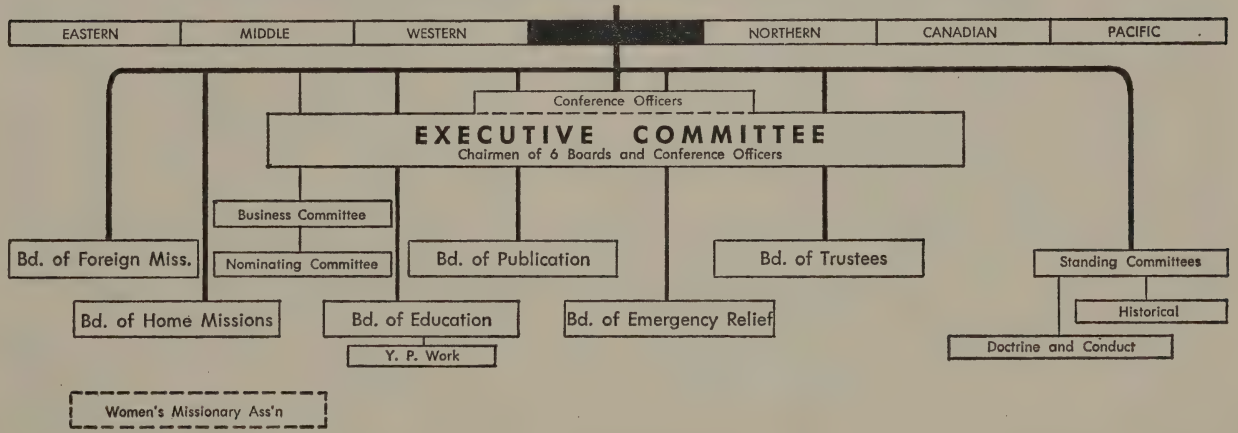
The Middle District dates back to 1868. Originally it was known as the "Western District Conference of the Mennonites of North America." It was composed of four congregations in Iowa and one in Summerfield, Illinois. This conference undertook to work in evangelization, education and city missions.

The Western District Conference originally known as the "Kansas Conference" was organized in 1877. In 1891 it changed to its present name. It was composed mostly of congregations organized by immigrants who came from Russia, Prussia and Poland in 1874 and following years. Of primary interest to this conference was education, home missions, care of the poor and church affairs.

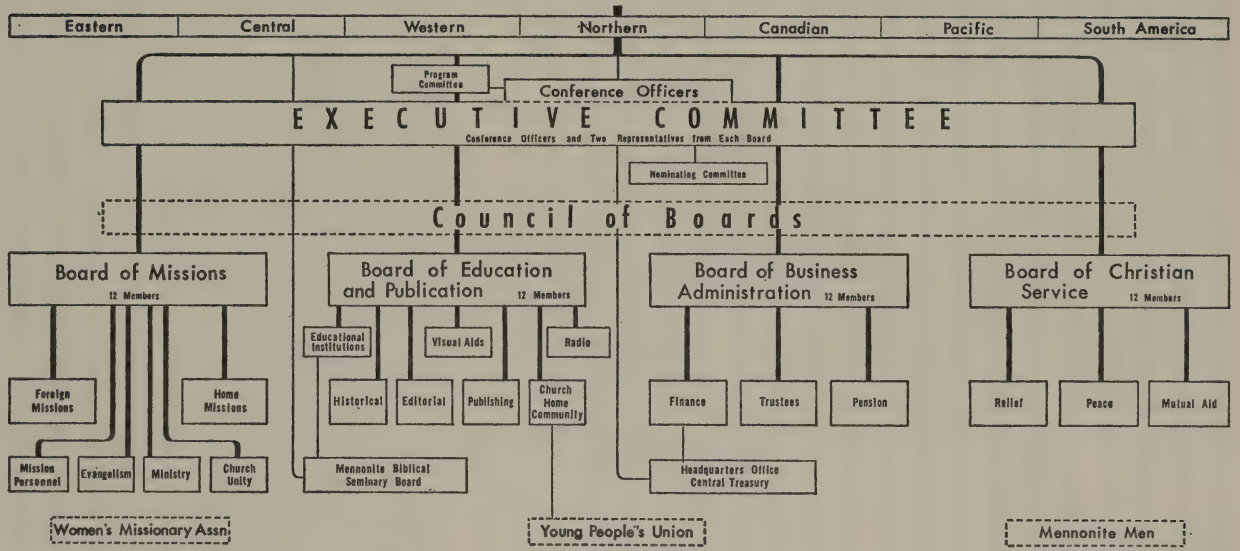
The Northern District held its first session in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in 1891. The membership here was composed almost entirely of new immigrants from Russia and some from Galicia, Austria and Poland. The primary interest of this conference was fellowship, home missions, evangelization and education.

The Pacific District was organized in Salem, Oregon, in

GENERAL CONFERENCE CONSTITUTION - 1929



GENERAL CONFERENCE CONSTITUTION - 1950



1896. Four congregations in Oregon and the Onecho Mennonite Church, Colfax, Washington, participated.

The Canadian Conference of Mennonites was organized in 1903. It originally was composed of congregations in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The influx of Russian Mennonite immigrants in 1923-30 brought great increase in number of congregations and membership. Fellowship, home missions and education were major concerns of this conference.

The Central District, originally known as "The Central Illinois Conference of Mennonites," was organized in 1899. It was composed largely of a liberal wing of Amish Mennonite churches in Illinois who were welded together under the leadership of Joseph Stuckey.

Fellowship, home missions, foreign missions, education and care of the sick were primary interests of this conference. In 1945 the congregations of this conference joined as a body the fellowship of the General Conference. In 1958 the Middle District Conference and the Central Conference merged under the name "The Central District Conference."

The Institutions

There was present in General Conference circles from the very beginning a keen and active interest in schools where Mennonite young people could be trained for church work, missionary service, teaching and for other vocations. These schools were not conference institutions as such. The Wadsworth School, Witmarsum Theological Seminary and its successor, the Mennonite Biblical Seminary, are exceptions.

The Mennonite academies, colleges and Bible schools are essentially independent institutions sometimes sponsored by corporations composed of individual Mennonite memberships based on contributions to the institution. Sometimes they were sponsored and supported by individual congregations

which elected, or nominated for election, members to the board of directors of the institution. In either case the schools and their sponsors conscientiously sought to serve the needs of conference congregations. Even though these schools were not officially and organizationally conference or church sponsored, the Conference and the churches did maintain a deep interest in them. Controversies within congregations and between congregations and among leaders of the Conference strongly influenced the program and the organization of these institutions. It kept them sensitive to grassroots concerns and needs but in certain periods of time also placed some unwholesome restraints of traditionalism upon them.

Financial support of these institutions was derived partly from tuition but more largely from contributions solicited by the schools themselves. Comparatively very little financial support was derived from conference sponsored solicitations. This was true also of schools like Witmarsum Theological Seminary and Mennonite Biblical Seminary. The support of the Wadsworth School, even though conference sponsored, was nevertheless derived from solicitation among congregations.

Concern for the aged, for orphans, the sick and the economic need of the brotherhood led to the organization of various activities and institutions. They were predominantly independent organizations promoted by leaders in churches and conferences, and they enjoyed in general the blessing and approval of the churches and the conferences.

Orphan societies were organized in Halstead, Kansas, under the leadership of Christian Krehbiel. Mennonite hospitals have continued to fill a vital need in General Conference circles. They provided tangible expression to the Christian concern for the sick and suffering. Hospitals like schools were not started by conferences but by concerned leaders and

groups in conference congregations. Even though they were independently organized, they were keenly desirous of maintaining close relationships with the congregations. They wanted to be and to remain truly Christian institutions and a real arm of the church. In many cases these hospitals were inter-Mennonite institutions in which General Conference leaders and churches took an active and leading part.

In recent years these institutions have actively sought closer church and conference relatedness. To this approach the General Conference responded favorably. Under the leadership of the Board of Christian Service various types of "relatedness" are now open to such institutions. There are now some twenty-six Mennonite hospitals in which General Conference Mennonites are actively co-operating.

Homes for the aged among General Conference constituencies date back to 1896 when the one at Frederick, Pennsylvania, was established. As a rule the institutional structure and sponsorship is very similar to that of the Mennonite hospitals. They too are seeking to establish closer church and conference relatedness and basically for the same reasons.

The large increase in the number of the aged has in recent years led to a growing need for institutions where the aged can find a home and loving care. There are some twenty-eight Mennonite homes for the aged in which members of General Conference churches are active sponsors.

Mutual aid has long been a treasured principle of Mennonitism. An outgrowth of this spirit are the various mutual aid societies prevalent in Mennonite circles. Most of these offer a mutual assistance plan in case of fire, storm and disaster. One old organization, the Mennonite Mutual Aid Plan, offered limited assistance in case of death. In recent years a rediscovery of the vital importance of this principle in the Christian brotherhood has resulted in a widening of

the scope of mutual assistance to include sickness, accident and burial expenses, auto accidents and the like.

Representatives of some twenty different Mennonite aid societies, sensing the need for and the value of co-operation in a service of growing proportions, have, since 1955, conferred together seeking ways to strengthen this service and to keep it as a witness to Christian brotherhood. As a result, the Association of Mennonite Aid Societies has come into being through which they can co-operate for the good of each and of all. These aid societies are almost entirely inter-Mennonite in character but members of General Conference churches have from the beginning been active participants and promoters.

The General Conference Mennonite Church through its boards or institutions has taken a leading part in the organization and the work of various other inter-Mennonite organizations and services. Most widely known for its far-reaching services is the Mennonite Central Committee with its widely varying ministry in the area of relief, peace, mutual aid, voluntary service, disaster service, mental health services, etc. Other inter-Mennonite organizations of greater significance are the Council of Mennonite and Affiliated Colleges which serves the common needs and purposes of the co-operating schools and the Council of Mission Boards which is the channel of clearance and co-operation for Mennonite mission boards and for relations between the mission boards and the Mennonite Central Committee. One of the most recent co-operative endeavors is the Affiliated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Elkhart, Indiana.

Tremendous social changes of the last ten years have challenged our churches to a new outreach of service and witness. These increasing urgencies compel flexibility of organization

and program in the Conference as well as its institutions. Consequently, adaptations and modifications in the organizational program and pattern of the Conference are even now in process.

Whitherbound?

As the General Conference Mennonite Church by the grace of God stands at the threshold of its second century, it is both natural and relevant to ask questions about the future. What trends are discernible in our conference life? What are the great choices we must make? What is our task and our destiny?

Views on the future of the Conference range all the way from those of "the prophets of doom" who claim to foresee the disintegration or absorbtion of the Conference, to "the prophets of glory" who see the same Conference in a kind of Messianic role destined to help all men, including other Christians and other Mennonites, "to see the light." The future of the General Conference probably lies somewhere between such disintegration on the one hand and such glorious vindication on the other. By divine grace, the General Conference Mennonite Church will however, we trust, continue to be a useful instrument in the hands of God for Christian witness and service.

I. Observations

Membership

The numerical growth of General Conference membership during the past century compares favorably with other religious groups. To correct short range perspective it is well to note that the rate of growth in the General Conference has well exceeded that in most other groups. By 1905, for example, there were 88 churches numbering 12,082 members. By 1929 there were 137 churches with 25,025 members. By 1955 there were 234 churches with 48,115 members. In each case a few churches failed to report. For the period 1905 to 1955 there has been a growth of 298 per cent. Immigration and the joining of new churches may indeed account for some of this increase, but not for all of it. This compares very favorably with the rate of growth in Lutheran groups for the period 1906-1956 calculated to be 244.4 per cent; or the Baptists with 238.4 per cent; Adventists with 237.3 per cent; Roman Catholics with 177.9 per cent; Brethren with 154.6 per cent; Presbyterians with 100.7 per cent; Methodists with 104.8 per cent; Congregationalists with 58.7 per cent; and Quakers with 7.1 per cent. There are of course some other groups such as Latter-day Saints (430.9 per cent) and Churches of Christ (964.8 per cent) which have grown more rapidly the last half century.

While this long range growth has been encouraging, it may be observed that the rate of growth has been slowing down and that in the last decade it has reached a kind of plateau. Many have been aware of this, but Leland Harder has called special attention to this retardation of our rate of increase. He has alerted us to certain sociological changes in our membership especially in two respects. The first is the increased urbanization of our constituency. The second

is the rapidly increasing ecclesiastical mobility of our members. He asserts,

> In the General Conference Mennonite Church with its 50,000 members, there has been a gross loss of approximately 10,000 members in the ten-year period from 1949-58. Of these, approximately 6,000 have transferred to other denominations across the nation, and 4,000 have simply been removed from the rolls as unaccounted-for inactives.

Even when one allows for a margin of error in these calculations and observes that many of these transfers are for good and natural reasons and that they include those who have joined other Mennonite and related groups and notes that this loss of members is balanced by the reception of new members, such mobility of church membership calls for further study as a significant factor which must be reckoned with in the contemporary situation.

Mission Outreach

With mission outreach as a dynamic element in the origin and development of the General Conference, it is not surprising that this concern continues to have a leading place in its program. From an early interest in *Heidenmission* among the American Indians, the vision moved on to include foreign fields.

Through the decades significant forward strides have been made in our foreign mission program not only in the adding of new fields such as India, China, South America, Congo, Japan and Formosa, but also in the development of new facets of missionary outreach such as medical work, agricultural missions, educational missions including seminaries, radio missions, and the printing of Christian literature.

Meanwhile, there was also a concern for home missions, promoted by a Board of Home Missions which gave way to a Home Mission Section in the new Board of Missions. At

the end of the first century of conference history, a growing concern for more effective "home mission" work and "church extension" is manifest. Several of the triennial sessions of the General Conference (Freeman, Jennings Lodge, Winnipeg) have reflected this awakening and the Study Conference on the Believers' Church (1954) and on Evangelism (1958) have sharpened this concern. The establishment of quite a number of new churches, mostly in urban communities during the triennium 1956-59, as well as the creation of Church Extension Services, Incorporated, to assist new congregations with their church building programs, are further expressions of this concern.

While interest in evangelistic outreach has received much discussion, much remains to be done to become effective in this area. While the concept of "church extension" has become the concern of the conference constituency, there is urgent need for a clarification of goals and procedures in a church extension program which is feasible and effective in our own situation. Failure at this point may quickly dampen the enthusiasm for this cause.

Christian Service

In the field of Christian Service a notable development is the enlargement of our understanding of the range of Christian responsibility. From the dramatic but narrower concerns of emergency relief and the ministry to our conscientious objectors to war, we have moved to larger concepts of relief and rehabilitation, to a more full-orbed peace witness, a concern for both physical and mental health, including the problems of the young and the aging. We are seeking to understand Christian responsibility toward the open sores of a paganized society involving such matters as juvenile delin-

quency, alcoholism, racial segregation, and other forms of social injustice.

It is at this juncture in our development that a Board of Christian Service Executive Secretary writes,

> A tenth of the population is shunned because God gave it a black skin; criminals are hanged—they could not love for they were never loved themselves; young lives are turned delinquent because no one showed them to Christ; and our increasing number of old people are becoming lonelier and broken-hearted because there is no place for them. . . . I wish that at this coming conference time we might truly come to grips with such challenges.

This broadening of the scope of Christian service is a necessary consequence of deepening insight into the implications of the Gospel. However, the peril of such broadening is also the possible loss of spiritual depth. Unless we safeguard the theological foundations of our Christian service program, we may lose the spiritual power and witness which have been ours in these areas. Continued attention to the biblical and theological grounds of Christian service is essential and a fresh thinking through of the implications of Christian love in our time is needed.

Educational Program

Christian education, another germinal element in the establishment of the General Conference, continues to be a controlling concern. While some in our group are focusing attention primarily on institutional higher education, a host of Christian workers is active in the local church school program.

On the institutional level it may be observed that we have established and maintain a rather large number of schools for the size of our group with resultant limitations in support and even certain tensions among our schools. Enrollment,

however, has increased substantially and according to information gathered by the Board of Education and Publication, on the basis of present interest and intention of the General Conference constituents, it is possible that enrollment in our liberal arts colleges may increase more than 100 percent in the next decade or two.

The future of the program of Christian higher education in Canada is at present hardly predictable, but with literally hundreds of Mennonite students in Canadian universities, it is clear that the situation deserves most careful study and could lead to new and creative developments in the life of the Canadian Mennonites which in turn would affect the future of the entire General Conference.

One urgent need for the future of Christian education in the General Conference is better integration of the total program of our academies, Bible schools, colleges and seminary and a better co-ordination of efforts to gain financial support for these institutions. Such integration and co-ordination will need to transcend national and district interests, seeking earnestly the welfare of the entire Conference.

Much also remains to be done in the area of publication. If in the past some projects have proved costly and thus discouraged new publication efforts, it is hoped that present efforts such as the graded Sunday school curriculum materials will serve the needs of the churches so well that our Conference may also be recognized for the appeal of its publication program. In this area, as in so many others, more integration of effort also across inter-Mennonite lines is needed and will probably characterize our program in the years ahead.

Administration and Stewardship

In a conference stressing the autonomy of the local congregation, the establishment and growth of the Central Offices

at 722 Main Street, Newton, Kansas, is certainly one of the most striking phenomena of the last decades. In a short time a rather strong centralization of planning and administration has developed. This is also reflected in the new constitution adopted in 1950 with its arrangement of combining previously existing boards and committees. From a pattern in which there were no central offices and no "executive secretaries" we have moved into a pattern in which every major board and the Executive Committee has at least one and in some cases several full-time salaried administrative secretaries. This has been made necessary by the forward strides in our conference work and has contributed significantly to its progress.

One area of particular growth is in the exercise of material stewardship. In this respect the General Conference also has moved forward steadily until it ranks well with other denominations who are in the forefront of effective stewardship programs.

Whether the future will lead to even greater centralization of our conference life is a moot question. There is considerable evidence that the process of decentralization is also at work in the fact that district conferences and the Canadian Conference are strengthening their own programs so that as we begin a new century of witness the entire organizational structure of the General Conference, especially as it relates to the area conferences, is being opened to new study.

The Ministry

While the idea of a trained ministry took hold in the General Conference at an early date, the present ministers are the best trained and best supported that the Conference has ever had. While there are wide differences among ministers, both in the matter of training and support, it seems

clear that in the United States the one-pastor-per-church pattern is almost universally accepted, and in Canada there is considerable diversity in practice. The increasingly complex character of church life in modern society, the rising educational levels in our conference constituency, and the influence of the colleges and the seminary will probably result in the raising of educational standards for General Conference ministers in the years to come. This too has its dangers as well as its advantages.

While nearly all churches of the Conference are supplied with pastors, there is a growing concern over recruitment for the Christian ministry. It has been observed that the most fertile centers for the recruitment of ministerial candidates have been shifting from the Eastern to the Central, Western and Northern districts in the United States, and that now Canada is supplying an unusually large proportion of prospective church leaders. The future of the General Conference in large measure will be in the hands of these trained leaders. Ministerial recruitment must therefore become a vital concern of every church and every present pastor as well as every school of the Conference.

Theological Trends

That the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy of the past several decades has affected the life of the General Conference can hardly be questioned. Theological tensions in local churches and in the Conference have often been a reflection of larger conflicts which were in vogue at a particular time and which had their origin outside of our own fellowship. What the future of these influences upon our life may be can hardly be forecast. To assume that such tensions are now resolved would be quite erroneous. On the other hand many believe that our Conference has moved toward a more stable theo-

logical balance finding its roots in a deep and dynamic commitment to the Scriptures, lifting up the centrality of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, and expressing itself in a new concern for evangelism and a biblically-rooted program of education and service. With other Mennonites the General Conference too is sharing in the recovery of the Anabaptist vision and is being stimulated and stabilized by it.

Inter-Mennonite Relationships

With inter-Mennonite fellowship and co-operation as one of the initial concerns of the General Conference, it is noteworthy that the end of the century finds the Conference still keeping this vision alive and participating actively and vigorously in inter-Mennonite ventures on many fronts. Among these are Christian service efforts such as the Mennonite Central Committee; publication efforts such as the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* and the graded Sunday school materials; and educational efforts such as the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries at Elkhart, Indiana; Seminario Biblico Menonita in Montevideo, Uruguay; and Union Biblical Seminary at Yeotmal, India.

If present experiences in inter-Mennonite co-operation are a portent of things to come, it may be anticipated that the spirit and the areas of such co-operation will grow rather than diminish and that thus the biblical witness of the children of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage will be given with a clearer and more unified voice and stronger impact.

II. The Future

Rural and Urban Culture

While the future rests in the hands of God rather than in the decisions of men, we may nevertheless venture that the

following issues may prove significant in giving shape to the life of the General Conference Mennonite Church in the years which lie ahead.

Beginning with a circumstance already noted, one issue is whether the General Conference can find dynamic and effective answers to the problems which are created by the rapid urbanization of the constituency. As a traditionally rural and conservative people confronts the liberalizing and secularizing influence of this urbanization, can it find effective ways of not only maintaining its faith but also of communicating it in an increasingly urban culture in which it must now exist and grow?

To suggest that the survival of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage is in some way dependent on the preservation of a rural culture is probably to misunderstand and to misinterpret this heritage. Significantly it has been observed that both early Christianity (Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus) and early Anabaptism (Zürich, Strassburg, Amsterdam, Emden) were cradled in urban rather than in rural cultures. It may even be, as Paul Peachey has proposed, that urban culture may be more congenial to true Anabaptism than is the rural.

What is clear, however, is that the years of transition are crucial, that these will call for much diligent study and understanding love so that rural-urban differences and tensions may remain creative and fruitful rather than divisive and disintegrative in our church and conference life, and that our vital spiritual moorings remain intact. If we have learned to say with Paul that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek," "neither bond nor free," we also need to say that in Him there is "neither rural nor urban."

Dispersion and Conference Unity

Another issue involves the question of how the General

Conference can successfully transcend any traces of provincialism, sectionalism, and nationalism which may threaten its larger fellowship and cohesiveness. Not only is the General Conference made up of persons of a large variety of cultural backgrounds, as E. G. Kaufman has pointed out, but the wide geographical scattering of these children of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage in Canada, the United States, Mexico and South America tends to militate against a closely-knit harmoniously functioning conference fellowship. As the bonds of a common spiritual heritage tend to become less significant through prolonged residence in new environments, the maintenance and development of a deep sense of belonging together will require added attention. With a conference history of dynamic flexibility, however, it is to be hoped that ways will be found to strengthen the bonds of fellowship across cultural, national, sectional, social, economic, and even racial lines. To do this, new forms of fellowship cultivation and organizational adjustments may become imperative.

Spiritual Depth and Theological Balance

More crucial than other issues is the spiritual depth and theological balance needed in our conference life. That the life and witness of a Christian fellowship depends in large measure on its spiritual dimensions is axiomatic. Only as the people of the Conference remain spiritually sensitive, warmly dedicated, and seriously committed to the doing of God's will and as they rely implicitly on the power of God through the Holy Spirit can life and growth in Jesus Christ be assured. As J. N. Smucker expressed it so forcefully in a conference sermon, "Before we can go farther, we must go deeper."

Theological balance, however, must be a corollary of spiri-

tual depth. With various theological movements tending to make their impact on our church life, a clear dedication to the Bible itself as the inspired Word of God, with Jesus Christ as the Lord of Scripture, is imperative so that no human system of theological formulation, be it modernism, fundamentalism, neo-orthodoxy, or neo-liberalism may usurp that place of ultimate pre-eminence which belongs alone to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures.

Conference Loyalty and Inter-Denominational Concerns

When loyalty to a heritage or to a conference becomes an end in itself, it is spiritually dangerous and deadly, but without vital loyalty on the part of its members no fellowship can fulfill its God-given mission. Blind loyalty to the General Conference would be as wrong as blind loyalty to any other human institution. On the other hand, to be ashamed of our Mennonite heritage or to be unfairly critical of the General Conference and its institutions may in some cases be ingratitude to God for that which He has done and insensitivity to that which He is still doing through them.

Conference loyalty, however, needs to be balanced by inter-denominational concern. Concern for the welfare and prosperity of Christian groups other than our own is not incompatible with loyalty to the Conference any more than a sense of civic responsibility is incompatible with loyalty to one's own family.

With the General Conference giving increased attention to conversation with the larger Mennonite fellowship and also with the still larger church of Christ in the world, it is likely that the years ahead will call for a new study of our conference relationship to other church bodies. Meanwhile it would be a great tragedy if intense internal schism should develop over the more superficial organizational question of whether the

General Conference should officially join one of the several ecumenical church councils (National Council of Churches, National Association of Evangelicals, American Council of Churches) and, if so, which one. It is the conviction of some that a strengthening of inter-Mennonite bonds at this time may contribute more significantly to internal unity and prepare the larger Mennonite fellowship to participate more effectively in the church at large. In any case conference loyalty and inter-denominational co-operation must be seen in the context of the larger mission of the church of Jesus Christ to proclaim His saving gospel to a lost world.

Congregational Autonomy and the Conference

At various times in our conference history, but especially at the Study Conference on the Believers' Church in Chicago in 1955, questions have been raised about the adequacy of a church polity in which each local church exercises as high a degree of congregational autonomy as is characteristic in our Conference. It is widely agreed that in the General Conference there is a movement toward a modified congregationalism in which the autonomy of the local church is tempered by a sense of responsibility to the larger conference fellowship. One concrete expression of this is the trend toward relegating the function of examining ministerial candidates to the district conferences. Another is the growing seriousness with which congregations view conference decisions and support conference causes. At the Winnipeg sessions the Conference declared, "We recognize that the autonomy of the local congregation and the freedom of the individual which we have often emphasized must always be qualified by the constraints of Christian fellowship, the authority of the Scriptures, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ." This need not imply a radical movement in the direction of centralized conference

authority, but it does recognize the limitations of an extreme congregational polity which may issue in corporate impotence and disintegration.

Freedom and Church Discipline

A further issue given impetus by the Study Conference on the Believers' Church is the revival of concern for church discipline. There is a growing consensus that the believers' church is also the disciplined church. The Findings Committee Report adopted by that Study Conference declared,

> Perhaps we have prided ourselves too much with our pattern of autonomy and freedom . . . The New Testament is for us that apostolic authority which qualifies our autonomy. There is likewise no autonomous church member, for each member is subject to the body. We are free, but our freedom is under the Lordship of Christ.

As a result of this Study Conference, a special committee was set up to make a further study of church discipline. The Winnipeg Conference endorsed the position that "The practice of scriptural discipline is a necessary characteristic of the believers' church." The publication of *Studies in Church Discipline* (1958) is another expression of this concern. Much remains to be done in this area, but it is a sign of vitality and progress that there is a growing awareness of the problem and an intensification of the search for better answers to it than have been given in the past. Neither loose individualism nor harsh and brittle group discipline will meet the need. Here new creative answers to solve old problems are being sought and found.

"Clergy" and "Laity"

While the General Conference is strengthening its seminary program and thus tacitly endorses the idea of a well-trained

ministry, there is also a growing awareness of the importance of the laity in the life of the congregations. This finds expression in the repeated emphasis that we must not make radical distinctions between the clergy and the laity in our brotherhood, in the development of the conference auxiliary programs by the Women's Missionary Association, the Mennonite Men, and the Young People's Union, in the new emphasis on the importance of the office of the deacon in the local church, and the insistence that lay members as well as ordained ministers should serve on conference boards and committees. Some voices earnestly plead that any kind of real distinction between clergy and laity is unbiblical and that we might profitably banish such terms from our vocabularies.

Conclusion

If the General Conference Mennonite Church, under God, in the years to come can overcome both the internal and the external threats to its unity without becoming narrowly sectarian; if it can maintain and develop spiritual depth without becoming theologically unbalanced; if it can find acceptable and effective formulas of inter-denominational conversation and relationships without losing that which is vital and signficant in the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage; if it can maintain a dynamic congregationalism without a disintegration of conference fellowship; if it can develop a vital and redemptive practice of church discipline without stifling individual freedom in Christ; if a well-trained church leadership can work humbly and effectively with an enlightened and dedicated laity in fulfilling the church's great tasks of evangelism and Christian education, of missions and Christian service, then indeed the future of this Conference is "as bright as the promises of God." To that end let us dedicate ourselves.

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